

GOODBYE TO A BIG STRANGER

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NARRATED BY
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GOODBYE TO A BIG STRANGER

MACMILLAN AND CO. LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1926

Five of the verses in this book have already appeared in the *Nation and Athenæum*, and I have to thank the editor of that periodical for permission to reprint them.

DEMOCRACY

We who were pointed
With a lonely joy
Knew a sharp blessing—
The blessing of loneliness.

Never again wild snow
Or wilder roses
In our secret places
Shall astound the day.

Crushed and levelled now
By the feet of thousands
Of marching angels,

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We must be born again;

Or if, being damned and dead,

We cast strange shadows,

Our graves must be trodden

Down by the armies of God.

This is our destiny—this

Is the end of wisdom—

To be mastered

By the saints at last.

And since we yield to them

They shall not remember

Their conquering feet are marching

On our floor of stars.

Yes, beneath their desert

We lie with loneliness,

Raddled and rusted,

With smooth stones over us.

CHAPTER I

Two women looked in at the door of a long dirty room. The yellow bright street glared behind them. A sad pig yearned towards some old bits of cabbage on which their high heels were set. One woman had orange-coloured shingled hair crimped over a low forehead, and bold old eyes. Her eyes were like her secret middle age looking out through the bars of her carefully erected prison of youthfulness. Her gay

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dress and light stockings were not quite clean. The other woman was stout. Though she was rigid she was more natural. She was not vivacious enough to be a deceiver.

"Oh my dear ... what's this?"

It was a long room divided along its length by a screen on which were pinned Chinese posters. The posters represented Bible subjects, but to the strange women this was not obvious. They did not know that the willowy creature in a long robe and a skull-cap with a little red button on the top was the prodigal son standing among his lithe pigs. The fact that the prodigal son and all the pigs were looking at a distant tiger threw the new-comers off the track. But of course to a Chinese artist a tiger is far more necessary to art than a knowledge of the rules of perspective. In the next poster the feast was thinly spread on a very steep table. The egg-browed father was formally calling the prodigal's attention to a little bowl of tea that clung to the slope.

Clifford Cotton, who had been working behind the decorated screen, appeared before the two women. One of his hands held a hammer and the other was smeared with blood. "It's a mission," he said. "*Obviously*." Everything that he saw or knew seemed obvious to him. "A panel of the harmonium is coming undone. I've been mending it for two hours but unfortunately it is still broken. And I have cracked my thumb. I'm a damn bad carpenter."

"Are you a damn good missionary?" asked one of the visitors, pinching her friend's arm to remind her that they were having a killing adventure.

Clifford sighed. "It's awfully difficult to keep your vocation young—don't you find? They've stopped me being a missionary so I'm only the mission printer now."

"Why, you're quite a character." Both women felt that, having admitted this, they were at liberty to release their bottled-up laughter without offence. One of them shrieked as she laughed.

"Perhaps you could give some money to the mission," suggested Clifford. "Not only the harmonium but the whole place is simply falling to pieces. Even a ten dollar note——"

"Not on your life," said the gay lady. "In fact, as the old song says—it's quite the other way. We're calling on all Britishers to ask them to take tickets for a show we're giving this evening. The Consul's lent us a room——"

"Is it a good show?" asked Clifford.

A dull voice from outside answered, "Not very."

The orange lady began to giggle irritably. Her forehead turned red. "If we depended on Lena for our advertising ..."

Clifford pushed rudely out between them and saw a third woman leaning limply against the outside wall of the mission. "This is Lena, is it?" he said. But she neither looked at him nor nodded. She was not interested in what people said. They were all enemies anyway.

"Lena is *obviously* wise," said Clifford, who was always seeking wisdom.

The gay lady said, "You certainly are a character. Now *do* come to our show. You won't be shocked, I promise you, though you *are* a missionary."

Clifford began speaking in an unnaturally polite voice. "Why my dear lady—of *course*. It's not likely that in a place like this my wife and I should wish to miss so rare an event...."

"Aren't you a dear! How many tickets can we put you down for?"

"Two, *obviously*. You surely don't imagine Mother will come."

"Edna, we must get home and get into our glad rags. *Home*—just listen to me ... the doctor's lent us a hospital ward and we've got the operating theatre for a bathroom.... We'll all dream about appendicitis all night...." She shrieked with laughter. "Come along, Lena."

"No, I can't," said Lena.

"Can't? What's the matter *now*?"

"I'm too tired. I'm too ill. I can't walk all that way up the hill and down again." "Well, my goodnerce me ... and what about the show to-night, pray?"

"Oh I'll get through that all right if you'll let me be."

"But what about clothes? You can't play the pianner in that old rag."

"Don't bother me."

"Don't bother her," said Clifford. "She can lie down on our sofa and dine with us. We're just next door from the Consul's where you're going to have your show. Daley'll have to open the last tin of salmon at last."

The other women looked annoyed. Lena always managed somehow to move apart, and no one ought to do that. But they agreed with a thin sprightliness and walked away. Clifford and Lena went slowly towards his house.

"Do you know," said Clifford, "I never saw any one with such a wise face as yours. I've been looking for wisdom for seven years."

"Wisdom's a sad thing to look for," said Lena in her grumbling voice.

"I'm a stranger in the world," said Clifford. "Seven years is not long enough to find wisdom, is it?"

"No. Nor seventy times seven."

"Ah, don't say that. Wisdom is only a short word for Being At Home in the World. Mayn't one look forward *ever* to being at home in the world?"

"Some people are born so. But they're not necessarily wise. On the contrary ..."

"My wife, Daley, is at home in the world. So I've always hoped that she must be wise. Only she can't teach me wisdom. She doesn't hate me enough. She loves every one. So she doesn't teach anything."

"Good Lord!" said Lena. "Isn't it better to love than to teach?"

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"Not if the pupil is a changeling who wants to be a man," replied Clifford. "I don't want lovers. I want an enemy to take me cruelly and shake the fairy out of me—and leave me a man—and leave me sad but wise, like a man."

Lena would not admit that she was surprised and puzzled, so she said nothing. She scarcely ever replied, which saved her a great deal of trouble and humiliation. Surprise did not show in her face, which was set in a mould of sadness and hostility.

"You could teach me wisdom," said Clifford. "You may not be at home in the world, but you don't look outside it. You are an enemy to fairies. I wish I could lie in your arms and so learn wisdom."

Lena's heart beat more quickly. But she said nothing at all.

"Oh hell," said Clifford. "I forgot. Two Chinese are having tea with us. I wish Daley wasn't so damn kind."

In the drawingroom of his house a gaudy paralytic old woman sat looking in fierce silence at two Chinese men. Clifford walked into the room saying, "Daley's not here. Oh hell."

Both Chinese stood up and bowed cheerfully, shaking their clasped hands in front of their stomachs. They had no standards of English manners. They were therefore not surprised by Clifford's behaviour, though they made a conscientious mental note of it. They supposed that Clifford, being an Englishman, knew the conventions of formal English greeting, and they trusted him to respect the conventions. One Chinese was the doctor's assistant and the other was Clifford's landlord. Clifford did not speak to them. "Mother, this is Lena," he said. He went away to tell Daley, his wife, about Lena.

Old Mrs. Cotton had a head that nodded perpetually. Her lips twitched and trembled and often made a little humming noise, *Mm-mm-mm*, when not otherwise engaged. She wore dresses with large ugly patterns; she was often striped like a wasp or spotted like a wild bird's egg. She bought gay knots of tinsel or cotton flowers to pin into her colourless hair. Her eyes were sharp and lashless and showed the inner rim of the lid like a bloodhound's. She spoke in a very deep shaking voice with meticulous slowness. When she pronounced the name of her son Clifford it sounded like Culliffudde, and the sound waved with the nodding of her head like the waves of a chloroform dream.

She said to Lena, "You evidently have not been acquainted long with my son Clifford. Between ourselves, neither have I."

Lena looked sad. She never allowed herself to look puzzled or astonished or excited. That would have seemed to her too friendly. She found it least humiliating to look sad always and half asleep.

"I have not known him long," continued old Mrs. Cotton. "Only seven years. You see, he never was born."

"Then he isn't ..." said Lena. She owed the place apart that she held in the world to broken sentences. People felt that they wouldn't have been clever enough to understand the whole, even if she had exerted herself to put it into words. She had a slightly crooked mouth too, which was additionally impressive.

"He is my son," said old Mrs. Cotton. "Only, I didn't bear him."

Chang Chu-lien, the doctor's assistant, looked smiling from the old woman to the young one. The talk was about sons, he knew, and it seemed almost safe to take part in it. "I have three sons," he said to Lena, trying not to seem doubtful. "My eldest son is five and a half years old. My second son is three years and two months old. My youngest son is an infant; he still sucks his mother." He smiled questioningly at Lena. It was her turn now, he evidently thought. But she made no reply. Perhaps some point of etiquette controlling the speech of English females prevented her from speaking. He sought for something else to say that might be suitable to the understanding of foreign women. "I am a Christian," he said. "My wife is also a Christian. We worship China Inland Mission. Mr. Liu Sao-shing is not Christian. He has two daughters."

Liu Sao-shing stood up and walked indifferently across the room to look at a comic calendar.

"Hak—hak—hak—." Old Mrs. Cotton's laugh was like a dog's bark. "Mr. Liu has kept out of the net so far."

Liu Sao-shing took care not to seem interested or anxious to please. "You mean I have avoided becoming Christian. Christian is not suitable religion for Chinese."

"Yet you rent your land to a Christian mission," sneered old Mrs. Cotton. "Which is there to seduce your native town."

"I make best use of my property," said Liu Sao-shing, "for my family sake. I make use of foreigners. Foreigners make use of Chinese." He gave a loud snuffle and, sitting down, looked contemptuously at the door by which, he hoped, Clifford would soon reappear. Clifford was at least a man, thought Liu Sao-shing.

Clifford had found his wife Daley trying on a new dress, singing in a loud happy voice. "Poopsi-poopsi-poop," she sang, blowing her lips, which had pins between them. Had it not been for the pins she would have been understood to be singing 'Jack's the Boy for Work.'

"I've brought home Lena," said Clifford.

"Foo-fee?" asked Daley through the pins.

"Oh Daley, she's a wonderful woman. A wonderful woman. A wonderful woman."

He nodded his head on each *woman* as though to emphasise the fact that Lena was a woman. He wasn't somehow quite sure of that, but he was sure that she was wonderful.

Daley took the pins out hurriedly. "Oh please, Clifford, please. Not wunnerful three times over like that, surely? Not more wunnerful than me?"

"Oh much more wonderful. Probably not so nice, but *much* more wonderful."

"Dash it all. Is she really? Well, I'll have to put on my new three-piece suit and then I shall outshine her."

She began to sing again as Clifford went away but she sang a little more doubtfully than before. "Poo-poo-per-poo ..." stood for 'Oh Genevieve,' a much soberer song. She dressed slowly and examined herself so closely in the glass that she could not see herself as Daley Cotton at all, but only as a pliable structure on the surface of which the powder was perhaps a leetle too thick—at the base of which a

tenth of an inch of lace petticoat was execrably visible. However, after a few moments of concentration these defects would vanish and Daley, perfect, would be able to see in the mirror the nice clean-looking radiant friend that was herself. Before the mirror she practised a little pleasant but don't-careish smile for Lena, but she would of course forget to smile that smile when the time came. She would walk out of her bedroom door and never think of herself again. She would leave her friend, the only self she knew, behind her in the mirror. One might imagine that friend, that self, left behind but not disconsolate, living a happy life in the mirror, a life of gigglings and songs, of arms thrown round the necks of nice romping other Daleys, a life of little dance-steps suddenly bursting the bounds of common motion—a life that Daley, outside her bedroom door, was not allowed to live.

She did not know Lena yet but she already disliked her very much. For this reason she took great trouble with her dress. That little line of petticoat might have damned her entirely, she felt vaguely, and justified Lena. But fortunately it had been caught in time.

She went into the drawingroom, her thoughts running in front of her towards the unknown Lena. She went in swaying her hands a little in front of her, beating time to the song she had been singing on the way. It was really not perceptible that her smiling lips were a little more rigid than usual. The Heart-to-heart Column of Daley's favourite magazine, the *Woman's Helpful Friend*, advised wives always to welcome cordially their husbands' women acquaintances. So Daley hurried forward very kindly.

"How lucky that my husband found you," said Daley. "We do simply *love* having visitors. There, Mr. Chang, you said you'd like to meet a European artist—we've taken you at your word."

Nobody said anything. Daley hummed a few bars because she was nervous. Then she began again, "I suppose it would be rather rude of me to say how wunnerful I think Mr. Liu's brocade robe. That kind of grey is like a powder-green, isn't it? I always think Chinese men *are* so lucky. To be able to dress in lovely colours removes the only draw-back of being a man."

Every one began to talk, with only a little shy feeling of adjustment. Daley liked Lena no better now than when Clifford had called her a wonderful woman. But she could never temper the friendliness of her smile or suppress the lively interest she felt in everything that any one said. She was less interested in women, of course, than in men, but hearing any voice pleased her. She had a habit of saying, "Oh *n-n-no*" in an excited incredulous voice, wrinkling her eyes and rounding her mouth into an O. She did it now and looked at Lena eagerly. It did not mean that she did not believe Lena; it simply meant that she would not have believed such a marvellous thing unless Lena had told her of it.

"Daley is excessively easy to surprise," said old Mrs. Cotton contemptuously to Lena.

"There are such lots and lots of things I never heard before," said Daley a little apologetically. "Although I've bin all around the world and bin married seven years."

"Have you been to Canton?" asked Mr. Chang, who was sweating a good deal in his efforts to adapt himself to this Christian conversation.

It was characteristic of Lena that she did not ask after the world round which Daley had travelled. Lena, looking at Daley, only thought, "I wish I needn't be hiding my life from her. I wish I were eighteen again and a virgin, with all my romance reserved for midshipmen at Portsmouth dances." A thin dream that her life was only a dream stabbed her with its pointed futility. She wished that Daley would die this

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minute and so smile at Lena, as it were, for ever. Or she wished that Daley would say, "It's all right, dear Lena, I know all about people like you.... I know that my husband will probably make you his mistress. But you and I will not be prevented from understanding each other...." Lena's wishes were like sores in her mind.

"Daley has been all round the world," said old Mrs. Cotton. "But she has only met Americans. So of course the fantastic is a perpetual surprise to her."

"Americans travel greatly, I believe," said Chang Chu-lien, loud with confidence.

"Indeed they do," replied Daley. "I suppose Mother Cotton is right in saying that they travel among common things and take their own air with them. But even outside the air of my dear United States, you don't find many people so fantastic as this funny old Mother Cotton here." Daley patted one of her dogs, since it was inconceivable that she should presume to pat old Mrs. Cotton's hard floral arm.

There were three dogs lying within patting distance of Daley. There almost always were. Daley thought of dogs a great deal and filled their minds with thoughts. At this moment the dogs, in Daley's mind, were all thinking of Lena spitefully. "Wouldn't take her at a gift, mum, not with a pound of Spratt's biscuits. Say mum, her shoes have never been for a walk."

However, one must entertain Lena. "Do you think fantasticness is a virtue?" Daley asked her. "I think it's a bit risky myself."

Old Mrs. Cotton preferred talking *of* Daley to talking *to* her. "Daley finds it very risky being the wife of Clifford, who is a changeling, as you may have noticed. But the risk is good for her. It's go-hood for her. An antidote to the American poison."

"Poor Mother Cotton," retorted Daley cheerfully. "Thinks of the United States as a big disease spot spreading over the whole world. And yet when I think of where I lived—the mountains and the big orchards in blossom and camping under the sequoias and the ice-man calling by day at houses which heard the coyotes by night—I just can't think there's any poison in a germ like my America."

"You think too small," said old Mrs. Cotton. "Holy ground becomes camping ground in America." Her jerking head seemed to shake the gouts of sound from her lips as a shaken fountain pen jerks out ink.

"Well—can't ground be both holy and camped on?" asked Daley lightly.

"Not in America," said old Mrs. Cotton fiercely. "If people pa-hark Fords on holy ground and prattle about God's Great Out of Doors—naturally God leaves the place at once. The holy ground is thus disinfected of holiness and becomes a perfectly safe Ca-hamping Park."

"To be a little selfconscious about being happy or good doesn't destroy the real happiness and goodness," said Daley. "It's only that Americans mean well and *know* they mean well—and Europeans may mean well or ill, but anyway they don't know what they mean."

"National selfconsciousness *is* destructive. It *is*. It *is*," shouted the old woman, speaking past Daley to the surprised Chang Chu-lien. "To be nationally selfconscious makes a kind of su-huffocating shell round reality—and fi-hinally withers reality away. Americans don't know how to *be* American—(whatever that may be)—they only know how to Americanise other people and to say Look At Us Being American. They

don't decide secretly to think a good thing or to make a good thing—they decide to advertise a good thing. They don't determine—with a breaking heart—to rid the world of suffering—they say, I'll—Tell—the World.... Benefactor Is—My—Mi-hiddle—Name...."

"Well—that's better than causing suffering," said Daley.

"I think not," said old Mrs. Cotton. "Tyranny is at least real. Ki-hindness has become simply another of those American synthetic products."

"We see no difference," said Liu Sao-shing, "between American culture and English culture. Both are very bad—in China."

"No-honsense—hok," shouted old Mrs. Cotton. "English culture never intrudes, never goes abroad where it isn't wanted. America is the Philistine invader."

Old Mrs. Cotton nearly always talked of one of two things, America or her changeling son, Clifford. She enjoyed being thought unreasonable, queer and heartless. She was one of those fortunate people who retain to a great age their power to offend. It made no difference to her that Lena did not say anything or seem at all pleased.

But to Daley it made a great difference. Daley liked to hear a light kind noise of talk on all sides, she liked to hear people saying—"My dear, did you know.... Oh Daley, I *must* tell you.... Why listen, people, I heard something great to-day..." and other people answering, "Oh *n-n-n-no*, not really.... Oh yes isn't it ... how funny, that's just what I always say...." But in the Cotton family there never had been heard a noise like that—except an inaudible noise, the noise of Daley's three dogs talking in her mind.

Lena would not speak and after a while Daley began to feel most uneasy. Daley had shown Lena everything possible, almost: her garden—"It attracts butterflies," she said, disarming criticism)—her illustrated copy of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*—her name printed in the *Woman's Helpful Friend* as Honorable Mention in an anecdote competition about pets—her pale brooding Kwan-yin in mottled porcelain—her Indian necklace from New Mexico—the Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Kennel for her dog Josephine, who would very soon-qualify for such an institution—finally, her Victrola. Daley loved her possessions very much indeed; she had not very many. Often she thought of them at night with wriggles of pleasure; often at night she imagined and mouthed conversations with smiling people, boasting mildly, saying in an eager whisper which could not wake up Clifford, "My dear, I have the darlinest Kwan-yin, a little like a tortoiseshell cat." "Oh Daley, you do say killing things; what is a gwonn-yin, anyway?"

"Oh, she's the Goddess of Mercy. All the gentle-hearted people in the world ought to kow-tow to her." But the Victrola was the thing Daley loved best. With a proud look of expectation she turned it on for Lena.

"This is Edward German's Shepherds' Dance but if you don't care for classical music we'll have some Harry Lauder in a minute."

"American music-machine is extremely classical, I think," said Chang Chu-lien, leaning forward and almost bowing to the Victrola. Even Liu Sao-shing looked a little reluctantly eager. Clifford buried his face in his hands.

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Daley came to the Victrola as to a refuge. *Surely* this must please Lena. She was so sure of the delightfulness of the Victrola that she did not even realise that Lena was not delighted. Lena was tired after so much looking at things. She detested mechanical music. While disc after disc span husky sounds upon the air, Lena sat frowning, turning over the pages of the *Woman's Helpful Friend* with a sour look. Many of the pages of the magazine were serrated near the words, "Sign below and cut along the dotted line." Daley had a passion for coupons and somewhere she had a great treasure of ten-day-tubes and sample cakes.

"The old woman's right," thought Lena. "Daley's only an American after all."

Daley was listening to the Victrola with great happiness. She was like a devoted person married to an asthmatic subject; she did not hear the imperfection of her treasure's voice. Harry Lauder's time was not yet. He would do, if all else failed, to make Lena smile. For the moment Daley enjoyed her unalterable cycle of tunes. Yet she hardly heard the tunes. She only saw the story that ran with the tunes. It ran through Daley's unblinking mind like a wan stream through a wood. It was a very childish story, but it seemed an epic to Daley. The Shepherds' Dance introduced the audience—all the gentle-hearted people Daley knew, grouped in the verandah of an hotel—Lion, Mr. Diamond, Dr. Bisket, Mrs. Ridley with the Ridley children, Ward, Edie and May—all with their elbows on a balustrade against which bougainvillea reared, as though the pale-green sea beyond were breaking in wine-coloured foam. The orchestra in the great room behind them played the Shepherds' Dance; the little Ridley children lifted up their petticoats, and danced, swinging their short-socked legs awkwardly to the swinging rhythm and showing their little drawers. March, 'Pomp and Circumstance.' The heroes came clattering on, beautiful men in beautiful uniforms—Russian Grand Dukes or Princes every one. Everybody looked at them with warm admiring hearts; Mrs. Ridley knew who they were. "The one with a dark moustache is the natural son of a king ... the one with the medals is the leader of the Imperial Guard ... the one who is smiling now was banished from his homeland for excessive duelling ... and that tall one, that tall noble one is Clifford Cotton, who held a fortress singlehanded against a thousand of the enemy...." Songs came next. Chaliapin in a song from *Prince Igor* ... Nigger Medley—'My Old Kentucky Home,' 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,' 'Let My People Go,' 'Careless Love' ... all the heroes were singing. Grand Dukes are so cosmopolitan that they sing nigger songs with a strong American accent. The noble Clifford sang tenor in the part-songs, and to him was given the solo voice of Chaliapin. Lion and Mrs. Ridley and Mr. Diamond sat enraptured, gazing in at the open doors, gazing at the heroes who glittered in a group round the orchestra piano. 'Poppies,' xylophone solo, by Harry Spinneker. Harry Spinneker indeed!—it was played by Clifford Cotton. The orchestra xylophonist smiled tolerantly as he lent his instrument; he evidently did not think a European Grand Duke could play the xylophone, but he was wrong. It was wunnerful, note perfect, 'Poppies'—a most difficult thing to play, with that quick rattle of strokes on the long notes and those cute little variations—never a mistake. Every one was paralysed with admiration. Daley felt almost unbearably proud of her creation in the light of Mrs. Ridley's awe. Immediately afterwards came the Humoreske labelled Played By Honoria Rock the Celebrated Lady Violinist, but of course—Clifford again. The violin was like a voice singing. Pianoforte solo, Percy Grainger's 'Shepherd's Hay.' Clifford again. The others all danced, stamping their big Russian boots, kicking high and squatting low. Alas, Clifford could not both dance and play. He played nimbly, smiling aside at the dancers with a whimsical wistfulness. Well, one couldn't keep the orchestra out for ever, though the poor thing was hopelessly outshone. After all it was paid to play. It played Sibelius' 'Valse Triste.' And at the breathless check in that tune—that pause which all devotees of popular concerts anticipate with a lump in the throat—a most dreadful thing happened.

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Deliciously dreadful. The heroes were on the verandah now, laughing, looking out across the crest of the bougainvillea wave. And—crack—a shot rang out. A Bolshevik hidden on the beach. Clifford threw up his arms and pitched forward. He lay as though wildly kissing the ground. Lion and Mr. Diamond said "My God" and sprang to their feet in movie attitudes. Mrs. Ridley clasped the children. Daley herself, in her peacock-blue three-piece suit, rushed in and threw herself across the body of Clifford. Was there a flicker of those noble eyelids? People said, "Who's that woman? His wife? Ah, poor soul!" Within the ballroom the orchestra, unaware of the tragedy, finished playing the 'Valse Triste.' Daley simply could not understand people who tolerated Bolsheviks. She turned the Victrola off, feeling giddy with rapture. The scene shrank to a little make-shift room in China with five unkind people in it. Lena's face was very dull.

"Shall we have Harry Lauder now?" asked Daley.

"I like to hear your voice best," said Lena wearily. She was looking at Clifford, but she hoped that Daley would go on talking in her golden voice.

Clifford looked very large, towering above Liu Saoshing on the other side of the room. His size, which was considerable, was exaggerated by the clumsiness of his clothes. Almost every detail of his clothes was unsuccessful, though nothing was careless. He had a large drawn face under dark thick damp hair. He wore spectacles with cheap metal rims. He looked alert, remote and uncertain, like a big wild animal in a cage. He looked over Liu's head at Lena and said, "Daley, what d'you think of my Lena?"

His talk seemed like a deliberate imitation of a child's, even to the gasps for breath between certain words. Lena thought that he might almost be taken for a "natural." He irritated, puzzled and excited her. She wished she had vitality enough to understand him, or even to love him. He looked as if he was never tired, never gentle, as if he loved food and did not occupy himself with what other people loved. As if he could hurt feelings gaily and never know of it. To Lena who, at thirty-seven, felt often ashen, he was like a roaring reviving fire. Lena's parents, a faded, pedantic, irritable father and a mother gently devoted to patriotic leagues and patent medicines, had bleached and sterilised her youth. She thought Clifford looked as if he could talk loudly and rather indecently at a bar, over one gin-and-bitters too many. He was far removed from the thin Fulham poet she had loved so long, whose only dissipation was a refined use of a mild drug, and whose obscenities were so excessively psychological. To Lena, manly humour, bar-humour, consisting largely of jokes dealing with water-closets, double beds and the accidental disclosing of undressed ladies, seemed, though disconcerting, very vital and exciting.

Daley was a little sobered as she said goodbye to Chang and Liu. Chang, though he had stayed nearly three hours, excused himself again and again for his departure as he bowed and bowed. Daley's smile was dimmed. She was secretly hurt by hearing Clifford claim Lena as his Lena. Daley was not a vain person though she often said—and quite truly—that she really looked wunnerful in the three-piece suit. Yet, though not complacent, she could not help feeling that she was a finer specimen of woman than Lena was. She had somehow always pictured "the woman who stole my husband's love," so often mentioned in the Heart-to-heart Column of the *Woman's Helpful Friend*, as much more like herself—in the three-piece suit—than Lena. She looked at Lena's pale sullen face, her straight unshining hair, her still sad eyes, her fidgeting hands, her waistless eccentric dress of imitation batik—and she thought, "The Riddleys would think her *queer*." And this was Daley's way of saying a good deal. The Riddleys, who lived in California, were Daley's touchstone. She did not consciously admire them very much, but she

referred all social doubts to her memory of them, because they were so happy. When she was lonely or obsessed with the queerness of her life, her heart retired into an imaginary Ridley reunion. The conventional pretty hygienic living-room of the Ridleys materialised around her; she could hear Mrs. Ridley's "Well, I don't like it—it's *queer*." She could see Mr. Ridley, stout, bald, shrugging his eyebrows as he took off his eye-glasses so that he might express his opinion of "freaks" unhampered. "If he was *my boy*" and "if she was *my girl*" were Mr. Ridley's most frequent contributions to a discussion of "freaks." It seemed that nearly every representative of the modern world had only been saved by an accident of birth from being put across Mr. Ridley's knee and well spanked. Daley laughed at Mr. Ridley, sometimes secretly and sometimes to his face—yet to remember him made her feel very safe. When her mother-in-law forbade her the solace of the Victrola, she found an alternative drug in the thought of herself at a Ridley party—every one talking at once—every one saying cordial and loving things—young Ward Ridley, with a front tooth knocked out by a boy at school, giggling over the bad jokes in *The American Boy*, little Edie handing round the chocolate fudge, Mrs. Ridley saying again and again, "I'n't it just *great* to see Daley home ... i'n't that a dandy suit she's wearing, Dad, i'n't it just *great* to have her home...." The Ridleys did not know that Clifford suffered from a tinge of queerness, and their ignorance helped Daley to ignore her danger. The Ridleys had only met Clifford during one week-end. Mr. Ridley had said that he was a "fine feller—thoroughly red-blooded chap." Mrs. Ridley had said, "he's a lovely man, Daley, I just love a big manly he-man." Clifford had fortunately been very careful during that week-end. He and Daley and Mr. Ridley had travelled to San Francisco together on the Monday and Clifford had had a real triumph. He had put on the commuter's manner complete with the smallest detail. Daley would not allow herself to remember noticing how proud Clifford had been to be able to say, "That's a good yarn. ... We're three minutes behind time.... Care for a look at the *Examiner*? ... Now you can't tell me you always remember to mail yer wife's letters...." A stranger had uttered a new catchword and Clifford's lips could be seen to move as he committed it to memory. But Daley refused to admit the triumph to herself. She simply tried to look at Clifford through Mr. Ridley's eyes and not so much to approve as simply to take for granted.

Daley thought that Clifford was intensely real and impressive. His heart, she thought, was as hard as his fine body, but that did not matter much for she could imagine a soft heart into his body. She loved his effortless frankness, his courage, his contentment and the fact that he did not enquire into the workings of minds. She had a horror of strangeness which she believed that he shared. Mrs. Ridley had once, in ardent confidence, referred to Mr. Ridley as "My *Mate*" and this seemed to Daley to imply an ideal which she and Clifford almost achieved. She knew that he also distrusted the something fantastic which haunted the house. She nearly succeeded in exorcising the ghost by calling the house "Our Home" and filling it as full as she dared of the kindly sentimental atmosphere of the *Woman's Helpful Friend*. Little home-made "cute notions" appeared stealthily in the drawingroom from time to time and stayed there till old Mrs. Cotton noticed them—things copied from photographs or cut out along dotted diagrams in the Making Home Homelike Column.

Daley was hurt by Clifford's reception of Lena, but she looked forward to the healing of the hurt by means of a good-tempered Mate-to-mate explanation later on in bed. Clifford often talked in Daley's mind, just as the dogs did. In Daley's mind he said all the things that unfortunately he never said with his own lips and never thought of with his own brain. She imagined herself in one of her new crêpe-dechine nighties, stroking his face and saying, "Dearest, I'm not sure that I care for your Lena." And she imagined

his reply—"Well, I'm sure that I don't—now that I've seen her side by side with you, my Daley ... my mate...."

But as the late afternoon wore on, it seemed that this delightful talk became less and less probable. Clifford was quite obviously delighted with Lena. No topic arose in which poor Daley could distinguish herself, but Lena could be vaguely clever on every topic. Daley liked to talk of dogs and gardens, of ghosts, of the Prince of Wales, of her travels round the world, of her neighbours, of funny small misunderstandings showing herself in a ridiculous light. She liked to say things beginning with, "I wonder ..."—things that had no possible answer except, "Yes, I wonder ..." She did a lot of very unimportant wondering. "I wonder if those two spiders are related—they look so very much alike...." "I wonder why a girl could be called Veronica but never Nemophila...." "I wonder if, when a dog lies in a round like a whiting with its tail to its nose, it's the same as us soothing ourselves by looking in the glass.... 'That's the nice face that other people see,' we say, and dogs say, 'That's the nice smell that other dogs smell....'" "I wonder what it'd be like to get back of each other's eyes—just jump quickly in and out again. Some people's eyes'd be like a curtain falling and other people's would be like a great fire..."

In reply to this kind of thing old Mrs. Cotton would often snort and say, "Good God!" displaying an attitude very disruptive to a wonderer. She never wondered, she was always bitterly sure. The gaunt old ship of her mind never set sail on little happy excursions; it travelled far over bleak seas, pressing against storms towards no port; it returned carrying no treasure, but barnacled and encrusted with the little fantastic ugly mysteries that belong to shoreless seas.

As for Clifford, he did not dare to wonder, just as a growing boy dares not play with the toy soldiers that delight his father and little brother. He was not yet far enough removed from the contemptible practice of wondering. He only allowed himself to be interested in things that existed, things that could be definitely known and learnt by heart, things that had actually been seen to happen. If he was a changeling, he had set himself conscientiously to be a man at last; he could not afford to admit fellowship with fancies.

He listened to Lena, however, because, though he did not understand much that she said, he was sure that all her knowledge was far removed from fancy. From her he hoped to learn bitterness and wisdom.

Lena spoke of most of the minor musicians of the day as her acquaintances, and half-heartedly analysed their work. "With Spencer Foakes you have a feeling ... his work's very like himself ... a kind of serene distortion. ... Billy Mitten knows means so much better than ends ... Anne Sorrel—"

"I've got her on the Victrola," cried Daley triumphantly. Lena looked at her coldly and ignored what she said.

"Anne Sorrel—poor thing—you can hear her hungry family through ... two ... and nobody's ever found out from her who the father was.... Her work's on the edge of understanding; I think, when she forgets to think, she *almost* knows ... but not quite. If you've heard her play Dart's 'Ballad in F' you probably know what I mean...."

Daley knew that Clifford scarcely understood one word of what Lena was saying. Yet she could see that he was fascinated. He sat with his mouth intently a little open, touching his lips with the tip of his tongue, moving his head and saying *Ah* now and then. Lena did not talk very much. She was a very

unlucky person and to-night she had quite a sharp pain in the muscles of her ribs. She was scarcely ever without some little pain, doubt or discomfort.

"Oh Lena," said Clifford. "I think you know everything."

"Except how to be alive," said Lena in a flat voice.

"That's the only thing I know," said Daley eagerly, but Clifford did not look at her.

"I should like to know enough," cried Clifford, "to be not interested in the obvious. I should like to be able to be haughty. But you have to *know* the obvious before you can be haughty about it. I should like it to seem as if I had thought the things I say—not simply seen them. But every one always gets ahead of me in thinking."

"Naturally," said old Mrs. Cotton. "Every one had the start of you."

"Dear Mother Cotton makes believe she has a kind of a joke on Clifford," said Daley to Lena, trying to save fragments of the desired Ridley atmosphere. "It really explains Clifford—and jokes don't often do that. She says—in fun, you know,—that he never was born. He was just found. And it's true that Clifford's got everything that belongs to grown-upness except practice. I dessay you've noticed that already. He simply doesn't know how to behave, unless he's copying somebody or doing it out of a book—do you, honey?—he doesn't know what to say nor what clothes to wear——"

"Hak—hak—hak—" suddenly yelped old Mrs. Cotton. "I heard him once asking Mrs. Lorne, the missionary, about her marriage night. He asked her——"

It was Daley's turn to convey rebuke. "Lena doesn't know Mrs. Lorne, Mother, so I'm sure that wouldn't amuse her."

"I do know her," said Lena. "Curiously enough, she's my aunt. That's why Milady decided to bring the show here—she thought we'd get fed and lodged free. But there's no room in the Mission ... and anyway it wouldn't have been very ... There's no harm in my poor dear aunt...That being so, how does she know enough about people like Edna and Milady and me to think us wicked. She seemed to know at a glance where Milady belongs. How does she know?"

"She doesn't really," said Daley. "She'd think the Bishop of London worldly if he opened a whist drive. She just jumbles all worldliness up together in the same world. She'd think it was just as worldly to wear silk stockings as to elope with a father of ten."

"As a matter of fact, so it would be," sighed Lena. "It's funny to think of me and Milady being worldly in the same world. It was funny that I ever started round the world with Milady and Edna. I was playing in a movie palace orchestra at Richmond and Milady sang a musical feature there and happened to fix on me... It wasn't a good plan, this coming round the world. I thought it sounded all right—but we're not good enough. And I didn't realise it meant living in an atmosphere of other people's torn grey lace underclothes. Edna's all right—too stupid to be otherwise. But Milady—well ... as I say ... even my aunt bridled...."

"What did the Lornes say about taking tickets for your show?" asked Daley.

"Said at first they'd derive no benefit ... didn't care to set a doubtful example to the Chinese. Edna swore we wouldn't shock them ... called it a concert ... clean fun ... God knows it's harmless enough, though as for *fun* ... Mr. Lorne said, 'For us, you know, there is only one kind of pleasure.... We find it when we kneel down ... in a quiet room....' But Edna persisted and—well—they said they'd 'look in.' Sounded safer than saying baldly they'd come." She laughed faintly. "*Clean fun* as a successful rival to ... But of course he didn't mean *pleasure*—he meant *glory*. Happy Lornes who can refuse *Clean Fun* on the pretext of a prior engagement with *glory*. Pity there are so few ways of being intimate with glory—only prayer—love—or alcohol...."

"When I want my glory," said Daley, "I take the Victrola into the garden, turn it on, and lie down on my back, with foxgloves leaning over my eyes and a puppy licking my chin. When Clifford wants his, he goes and gloats over his socks and ties."

Clifford had been shuffling impatient feet on the carpet. He was anxious to reveal himself to the wise Lena. He could not bear this talk of aunts and Ednas for a second longer.

"I don't want glory," he shouted. "I want wisdom. I'm a changeling. To be a changeling sounds much more charming than it feels."

"How does it feel?" asked Lena without looking at him.

"Well, for instance, I have a perfect memory," said Clifford. Now he was safely started. His broad face glowed with pleasure. "I remember everything that ever happened in my life—back to a certain day seven years ago. And that must be the day I was changed."

"What were you changed from—and what into?" sighed Lena.

"Why, I was changed from something that had no home into me—an English Esquire in an English garden. A butterfly wouldn't leave my face; it shimmered against my eyelashes so that I could hardly see the snapdragons. Then it went away and I saw everything. Everything. There is nothing about that day or any day since that I can't remember. There was nothing in sight that I didn't see. Some snapdragons were red and some pink and some white, but there was only one yellow one. The path was made of cinders and there were upside-down bottles bordering it."

Daley shuddered and laughed. "Poor garden. It's like imagining a beautiful woman in the leg-of-mutton sleeves of thirty years ago."

"It had been raining," continued Clifford. "And all the upside-down bottles had water in them—in that hollow, you know, that the bottoms of upside-down bottles have."

Lena nearly groaned. All that Clifford was now saying seemed insanely uninteresting. Bottles and butterflies—cinders and snapdragons.... Why not a washing list? She neither liked fancies nor facts. But Clifford did not know that she was bored. He did not know anything except the things he had seen or the things he had been told. He continued to describe the details of that day with uninspired accuracy—the hen behind the sunken fence scratching cabbage stalks and examining them first with one eye and then with the other—the worms growing alternately long and thin or short and fat as they blundered between the lumps of wet earth—the little beards of raindrops under the chins of the roses—the cloud that was shaped like a white cat until its neck got too thin and its nose crumbled—the climp-climp of water falling from the eaves into the water-butt—and the sight of his old mother hobbling round the

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garden, her muddled crest of grey hair seen first above the box hedge, and then the whole of her, dressed in black and yellow.

"Of course he didn't know that I was his mother," said old Mrs. Cotton. "No more I was. I was the mother of the lost Culliffudde. I could see at once that this wasn't the son I bo-hore."

Daley looked a little nervously at Lena to see if this ridiculous story—which was one of the most serious flaws in her carefully constructed shell of "home atmosphere"—was making Lena despise the Cotton family. "Dear Mother Cotton, you're confusing poor Lena. It's just a joke, you know, Lena, an ingenious fancy. I remember the day quite well. We'd just come back to England from our honeymoon in Dieppe. We were staying with Mother Cotton. I remember the day so well. Clifford had gone out to see if a snapdragon had any teeth ... we'd bin arguing all breakfast-time about whether snapdragons had any teeth ... just in fun, you know.... It was so sunny and sort of humming-warm—do you remember, Mother Cotton?—you thought you heard music passing by and went out to look? And while she was gone, Clifford came running in shouting, 'Which way—which way?'... I said, 'Well—what about the snapdragons?' and he shouted in a comic voice, 'Dragons—I've left the dragons all behind.... I'm a man now....'Of course it was just a game; it was then that I began to realise what great babies men are.... But he must have got a touch of the sun, for after that he was ill for several days ... and for a long time he was very ... nervy. And he never remembered anything before that day or forgot anything since. So he likes to pretend he was a fairy turned into a man"—she giggled nervously—"it sounds like the directions in my English cook-book—'Turn into a buttered walnut'—or something like that...."

Old Mrs. Cotton snorted loudly. Lena laughed a little. She laughed in a whisper, biting in the laugh, as it were. It sounded like *ff-ff-ff* "One wonders what happened to the son you bore ..." she said contemptuously to old Mrs. Cotton.

"Of course he was spirited awa-hay."

"Anyway," said Daley hurriedly, "it's a cute fancy. And there certainly is something unnatural about Clifford's marvellous memory."

"Yes, I have a marvellous memory," said Clifford. "That's why I have such short sight. If I didn't have such short sight my memory would burst. I became a missionary, you know," he added after a pause, "because it seemed at the time that that was the only thing for a changeling to be. Of course I couldn't go on being the plain English Esquire I seemed. I didn't know how. So I thought I would become a sort of saint, as other fairies have before me. But somehow in my case it didn't seem to work. Missionaries in these days have heavier feet than they used to have—heavier feet than saints and fairies. Mission work isn't saints' work any more—it's practically a 'gentleman's profession' now. However, I had to be a missionary, because magic was the only thing I knew. But I didn't *want* to know it. I wanted to know about wheels and England and how to tie a white tie and what to say when people asked me what I thought of the situation in China. I wanted, and still want, to accept quite calmly everything that men accept. That's another way of saying I want to be wise. It is easy for me to accept gods and fairies because nothing *outside* the range of human wisdom can surprise me. But the kind of wisdom I want is understanding of the things I see. Men, for instance.... Nobody will explain men to me. I can see their eyes and noses and thick hands, but I can't see their thoughts and nobody will tell me about men's thoughts. However the fact that I was a changeling and was familiar with gods and fairies clearly indicated the career of a missionary—and I still am a missionary, though they said I mustn't preach after

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they heard me once. They said they would rather I learned printing—they said that was a more suitable sphere of endeavour for me. It seems it doesn't do to take magic so much for granted as I do. You see I want to learn about men so much more than men want to learn about gods. The business of a missionary is to make magic mysterious to men—to men who are too wise for magic really. It is apparently wrong for a changeling to preach common obvious magic to wise men. It ought to be the other way round—and it will be some day. Some day I shall be wise enough to teach wise men a magic wiser than they. Lena could make me wise, if she would. Lena has such a *very* wise face. She could make me see men's thoughts, perhaps. I have *such* short sight."

Daley felt more and more uncomfortable as this explanation went on. She watched for a loophole that might allow a new subject to fly into this dangerous enclosed air of strangeness. She watched for a suggestive word, a path back into the commonplace. *Short sight*. That would do. Short sight was thoroughly Ridley-esque.

"Oh Clifford, tell about Gregory," said Daley, beginning to laugh. When once she began to laugh she never could stop. She often had the greatest difficulty in making her face look polite and quiet again after something had amused her.

"Haw-haw!" roared Clifford. "Yes, Gregory's our ex-puppy, you know,—Josephine's last litter. And yesterday, before I put my spectacles on, I saw something on the floor. I thought Gregory had forgotten himself again, so I beat him and beat him. And when I put my spectacles on, I saw what it was on the floor and it was only an old glove—an innocent old glove—haw-haw!"

"Ha-ha!" sobbed Daley. "Poor Gregory must have thought, 'What have we here—a completely new sin ... what *ought* I to have done about that glove?' and next time he sees a glove anywhere, his jaw'll drop and he'll say 'Lord—if I haven't laid another glove without knowing it....' Darling Gregory, but we're going to allow him to commit one sin free, so as to catch up with that whipping. Ha-ha—!"

"Haw-haw—!"

Lena laughed, "Ff-ff-ff!"

"What a stopper of a laugh," Daley thought. She imagined the thumb of a waiter stopping the mouth of a foaming bottle. "Ff-ff-ff, indeed!" Yet she couldn't stop laughing. She felt her face to be absurdly convulsed. She could have laughed for twenty minutes at that one funny thing. New aspects crowded to her mind, new glimpses of the confusion among Gregory's laboriously acquired standards of canine virtue, a new vision of Clifford with pink unspectacled eyes righteously pursuing the shrieking Gregory round an old glove.... Ha-ha-ha....

CHAPTER II

Every tree in the grove

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Is a miser of light,
Crying over and over,
Give me my rights.
And each tree asks of his kindred
That their leaves be withdrawn
From his sky, and their hindering
Shade from his bright lawn.

It had begun to rain as Lena, Daley and Clifford walked behind a coolie with a lantern towards the consul's compound. Gigantic shadows of the coolie's hurrying legs, so close to the lantern, snapped like great scissors along the wet whitewashed wall. Across the glow immediately around the lantern the rain seemed to fall slowly like snow. There was a restless murmuring of rain among the eucalyptus trees.

Mr. Diamond, the consul, always kind, had had his piano carried into the shed. Rows of assorted chairs looked rather hopelessly at the piano and listened to the high smooth stir of the rain outside. Daley's three dogs, their fur pommaded by the rain, bustled in and smelt the piano. One by one they set their seal of approval upon the piano in their own frank but rather regrettable way. Every one pretended not to notice this.

"You brave people. You brave people," said Mr. Diamond, coming forward to take Daley's hand and to hang up her wet coat. "Heaven doesn't seem to have blessed our venture, but our Daley can always be trusted to defy Heaven."

Mr. Diamond was always rather sprightly, but to-night the sprightliness seemed to have gone deeper than usual and he was sprightly all through. The chair from which he had risen as Daley came in was cheek by jowl with the chair on which the orange-haired Milady still sat. Edna was sorting music soberly at a little distance.

"Well Lena, we're all in clover!" shouted Milady. "You're not the only one, you needn't think. Mr. Diamond's stood me an' Edna a terrific feed and fizz to beat the band."

She leaned over the arm of her chair and shook her finger roguishly at Mr. Diamond. Her fat knees were wide apart in her tight sky-blue satin skirt; her manner of brawling triumph spoke rather pathetically of anxieties for the moment forgotten.

Mr. Diamond looked pleased but at the same time gentlemanly. "There is something of the knight-errant in me," he said. "I couldn't think of leaving two fair ladies at the mercy of whatever dinner the doctor's poor old cook might provide. And again, apart from all unselfish considerations, I thought we should all prefer music that wasn't inspired by indigestion."

"Aren't you a scream," said Milady. And in the silence that followed her loud giggle, Clifford could be clearly heard at the door saying to Lena, "I shall watch your face the whole time."

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"Just listen to Clifford!" exclaimed Daley. "I warn everybody that he's been married seven years. You can see that for yourselves by the fact that he doesn't offer to help the lady off with her wet coat."

"The Apache method," murmured Mr. Diamond. Every one was beginning to get a little tired of trying to be amusing when Lion came in and the whole effort had to be renewed.

"Rain, rain, rain," said Lion. He and Mr. Diamond disliked each other and always met in an explosion of heartiness.

"Rain, rain, rain and yet more rain," echoed Mr. Diamond helpfully. "I foresee a flood and these ladies obliged to stay with us Noahs in the Ark. We shall have music every night."

"And fizz," suggested Milady.

"I've only got one case," said Mr. Diamond. "Noah, I suppose, had at least a pair. But such as it is, it is yours. A poor thing but your own."

Lion, after the preliminary jocosity which was his tribute to the presence of Mr. Diamond, went to Daley. Lion represented a tobacco company in Kan Lu Pa and would continue to represent it until he arrived at a pensioned old age in Tunbridge Wells. Yet whenever he saw Daley he began to talk of Canada. Daley was never cruel to him, yet this constant talk of Canada—a euphemism for despair which hardly does justice to the Dominion—was a protest against her cruelty in being married to a man she loved. Canada was a phantom sword uplifted over the head of Lion's love. But if the sword had fallen it would have bounced harmlessly off. For Daley, though kind to all men, did not very much like them with small noses.

"What a dismal way of enjoying ourselves," said Lion to Daley, looking irritably at the piano. "I'd rather be at home over the stove with a good book, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly not," replied Daley. "Good books can wait. In fact, as far as I'm concerned, they can wait till Hell freezes over—as those *dreadful* Yankees say. Music's what I'm crazy for, Lion. Not classical music like Mendelssohn and so forth but *home* music—the take-me-back-to-Dixie kind of music...."

With other young men Lion was dictatorial and liked to make it quite clear that he was the most intellectual person present. But Daley, with the friendliest intentions, always made him feel a little pompous. It was safer, as well as more delightful, to listen to her than to talk to her. Occasionally he treasured up intelligent observations to declaim to her. Sometimes she seemed to be impressed by these treasures of his mind, even saying, "Oh Lion, you're a wonder. However do you think of such things." Sometimes she made the unfortunate but innocent mistake of saying, "Oh that's *fine*, Lion, I haven't heard that one before." Sometimes she looked round at all the listeners and said, "Do listen to our Lion, isn't he *cunning*." And sometimes she only said, "Oh Lion dear, don't prose." He was a very serious sensitive young man. He had narrow upright shoulders, large brown eyes, hollow cheeks and a too long upper lip. He was perhaps twenty-two years old.

Lion and Lena met. The glow that was meant for the miraculous Clifford was still on Lena's face. She looked, as the cultured Lion noticed at once, like a picture by Mr. Augustus John. She had a flowered Chinese shawl about her shoulders and the white wall behind her was shadowless. "I'd be absolutely terrified of her," thought Lion. He almost added "in life," as though Lena were dead. Though cultured, he was a simple young man.

Daley introduced him to Lena. "You're both so wunnerfully clever—you'll love each other."

Mr. Diamond's boy was handing round liqueurs. Lena's hand shook slightly with a glass of Dom in it. Clifford was watching her and she was making a real effort to be womanly and affable. Her manner was secretly meant to be a copy of Daley's, but the secret was well-kept. No one would ever have suspected the two manners of being related. Lena talked to Lion in her small husky voice, bending every twig of conversation to an abstract curve. Lena's most characteristic reply to a piece of gossip about a neighbour was, "But don't you think people always do ..." She was never content to say, "Oh really, did he?" and so add a little humble buttress to the existing edifice of talk. She always must build a conversational annex of her own, much more austere and academic in style than the original structure.

The effect of Lena upon Lion was curious. With Lena he could in no way feel manly. She repelled him physically so that he almost shuddered as he looked at her thin neck, her soft lifeless hair and the too evident bones of her haggard face. And he found at once that he could not impress her intellectually as a man should impress a woman. Whenever he spoke in an effort to assert his intelligence, she slid her sleepy eyes round upon him, forced a smile which looked to him like a sneer and uttered a half sentence—the half, as it seemed to him, of a tiresomely suggestive sentence, which made his own assertion seem crude. She was a No instead of a Yes. She was a valley where a mountain ought to be. Yet by her negative methods she most unfairly succeeded. But he went on trying. He was determined not to be silenced; he was set on achieving an eventual success with her, on proving himself to be dignified, as every man should, in the presence of women. Was he, a man getting on for twenty-three, a Fabian and a reader of no less than three Radical weeklies, to take second place to a sickly unmarried woman of the despicable age that lies between thirty and forty, a woman with no constructive solution of the world's difficulties at all, a woman who made no remarks complete enough to be either approved or refuted? He went on trying.

Even when Lena said, "Well, I never thought of it in *quite* that light ..." it was evident that she had no opinion of that light at all and Lion could not help feeling disconcerted. He could not help trying to justify "that light" with words that made the poor light shine more and more crudely, even in his own sight. Lena's replies were not aggressive. "Well, I must say ... well of course you may have studied the question more deeply than I have.... I dare say that might be said but ..." He could not leave her alone. He could not allow her to triumph by this cold non-co-operation—especially while Daley was watching.

How different was a discussion with Daley. Daley never argued, though she often defeated argument by accident. She often laughed at Lion, though her laugh—Ha-ha—was like applause compared with Lena's Ff-ff-ff. Of course even Daley's method was rather unsatisfactory to a well-informed young man who had once shaken the hand of Mr. Sidney Webb. Yet with Daley Lion could always maintain a reserve of manly tenderness. He could always think, "Yes, my dear, I concede you the last word. You certainly take the wind out of the sails of my fine logic. Nevertheless logic remains logical, and truth is truth...."

With Lena Lion's truths might be truths but they seemed uncomfortably immature. All Lena's truths were too old and cynical to join battle with his fresh edifying young truths.

If she had had a body worth looking at he felt as if it would have been more easy either to agree with her or to disagree with her generously.

Poor Lena was enjoying a triumph. Fortunately she did not know that to any normally charming woman in the world her triumph would have been a thing to laugh at, or cry over.

Daley could take no part in the discussion. She sat beside Mr. Diamond who was talking to Milady. She looked at Lena and Lion and Mr. Diamond with round reproachful eyes. "These are all people who said they liked to hear my voice," she thought with a feeling of innocent annoyance. She could not assume the look of detached indifference that dignified the face of Edna, who also watched the disputants. Daley was not accustomed to breathing this outer air. She was not accustomed to seeing Lion and Mr. Diamond thus in profile. She occupied herself unwisely in drinking a glass of port wine, having just emptied a glass of crème-de-menthe. She was not used to drinking wines or spirits. Drinking was a risk one took on great occasions; one then had to pretend to be delighted with rather nasty stinging tastes. It was also necessary to pretend to feel blasée and normal as one put one's glass down. This evening, after the port wine and the crème-de-menthe, her patience was marked but precarious for a long time. Everything in the room looked impersonally beautiful. Things mattered—but not closely. It mattered, but not closely, that Clifford's eyes were unwinkingly fixed upon Lena. Daley's own hand on her lap was as impersonally satisfying to her as a flower. The diamond ring on her finger looked so right that it might have been placed there by God or by a relation of the Riddleys. It had, of course, been placed there by Clifford, but he had not chosen it. A jeweller's assistant had chosen it in compliance with Clifford's request to be shown the kind of ring most men buy for their wives. It seemed to Daley most subtly and excellently chosen. She felt like a diamond herself at this moment—sleek and shining, with a warm sparkle of crème-de-menthe and port wine at the core.

It was extremely puzzling to find herself glowing unseen. She was never selfconscious unless she felt that she was neglected, which was very seldom. She had no theory of charm. She read, of course, regularly and with awe, the Beauty Secret Column of the *Woman's Helpful Friend*. She often planned to follow the advice given. She was duly impressed by the advertisements and made confused mental notes in the hope of Keeping her Schoolgirl Complexion, of Getting Rid of That Film, and of avoiding the dreadful fate of those who do not use Listerine. But she made use of no wiles when it came to the point. In the presence of Clifford wiles would have been wasted, and in the presence of other men they somehow never seemed to be needed. She was scarcely ever made aware of the dangerous charm of other women, and the word *competition* would never have occurred to her—as it would have occurred to Lena. Even now, in this short twilight of neglect, Daley did not recognise any such thought as, "I've slipped out of the middle of the picture—where I belong." She simply looked from Lion to Mr. Diamond with a rankling instinct that things were far from being satisfactory just now. She tried several openings on both sides. To Lion—"Well, if I'd bin Viceroy of India I'd of—" To Mr. Diamond—"But they say Whiteaway and Laidlaw has the cutest little—" Back again to Lion, "But that's Bolshevism pure and simp—" And again, "Oh Lion *darling*, how *can* you talk such nonsense? If the miners' wives can afford to buy fur coats and diam—" But not one of these attempts was successful. Lion and Lena, Mr. Diamond and Milady broke through as though Daley's words had been blank air. It was like the mild beginning of a nightmare to Daley—the kind of nightmare in which you gradually realise that you have ceased to exist. Her mouth tightened.

"The fact remains," said Lion, "that, out of a thousand munition workers in nineteen seventeen, seven hundred and eighty voted against ..."

"That's just the kind of fact," replied Lena, "that doesn't."

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"Doesn't what?"

"Doesn't remain."

"Too-too-tootle-oo ..." sang Daley suddenly in a loud flutelike voice. "Nobody's talking to me-e-e." It was a little out of tune, and this was the only sign of her anger. It was a successful interruption. Lion and Mr. Diamond looked at her with indulgent smiles. Even Lena smiled at her with, Daley thought, a boy's smile. "I wouldn't like to undress in front of her, somehow," thought Daley. "She's not a woman at all. No harm in that. Clifford can't go on for ever looking at an imitation boy."

Milady said, "Well gurls, what about getting a move on?"

The doctor arrived, wet and puffing. "Rain, rain, rain," he shouted, but nobody dared to acknowledge this password except by merry nods, for Milady, Edna and Lena were converging purposefully upon the piano. Lena, whose mood had instantly changed when talk had ceased, sat limply down on the music-stool. She looked with sombre martyred patience at two heavy-booted French railwaymen who were snorting "Tchou—quelle pluie!" as they came in, trying to hook raindrops out of the backs of their collars with their fingers. Lena began scornfully to play Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song' and this comforted the missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Lorne, a good deal as they came in. "The fun is perfectly clean so far," they obviously thought as they sat down. They fixed their eyes bravely on the stout naked arms and gaudy hair of Milady. Mrs. Lorne's mouth twitched incessantly into a gentle one-sided snarl. There was a mole in the crease between her nostril and her cheek, and it seemed as if her lip were hitched on to the mole by an invisible wire, as a toy might be jerked on a thread round a pin. Mr. Lorne, a very small firm-looking man, sat down three chairs away from Lion, so as to mark his disapproval of the tobacco trade in China. Daley, sitting between Lion and Mr. Diamond, leaned forward to wave her fingers encouragingly at Mrs. Lorne. But every one was hushed to a sacred silence by Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song.' When it was over Mr. Diamond said loudly, "I *like* that. Perfectly delightful. I *like* that," and slapped his knee. But Daley was the only real clapper. She was clapping for the absent Riddleys. They always clapped specially hard after tunes that they had on their Victrola at home.

The audience gathered courage as the show proceeded. The two Frenchmen began arguing about the theoretical wisdom of an *impasse réussie* in the bridge hand they had just left. Mr. Diamond, who was rather excited by champagne, flattery, and the presence of such an unusual number of women, repeated himself into Daley's ear.

"They're really quite agreeable women," he said emphatically. "Not ladies of course—in fact quite vulgar. But agreeable of their class. It's no good being too fastidious in China, Daley. You have to keep a sense of proportion. It's essential. A sense of proportion is essential. And a sense of humour. That's essential. A sense of humour and a sense of proportion are essential. Not a doubt of that. You can't afford to pick and choose in the Far East. Of course at home ..." etc., etc.

Daley wrinkled her forehead. "He's quite het up by that champagne," she thought. "The darling thing. If one met him to-night for the first and last time one would never know what a darling thing he is. Nor how safe and wise he'd be in an emergency."

"I love yew deurr ..." sang Edna in a deep trumpet-like voice. She stood rigidly with a lot of spare breath stored up in her large chest as she sang. Her eyes, however, wandered about the room, counting heads. Fifteen at four dollars each. That is if Milady persuaded the Chinese to pay at the same rate. "Love is a
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rowse that has no thorns fur me.... Love is a sahn that has no setting deurr...." Lena at the piano sat with her head thrown back and her jaw dropped, looking under heavy lids at the score. Her hands flopped loosely about the keys. She was not earning her money conscientiously. While Edna sustained a long lonely note of final love, Lena, relieved for half a dozen seconds from duty, looked impassively at the watching Clifford. She was hoping that he would never find her out.

Poor Milady, who was really a very brave woman, filled the part of comedienne in the troupe. She began to sing a very sprightly song about dancing. She shuffled her feet slightly as she sang, shrugged her shoulders and her hips rhythmically and played an invisible piano in the air in front of her, as though she were pretending that the noses of the audience were the keys.

Some people like the Lancers,

And some the Minuet.

The old Victorians

Weren't terpsichoreans,

That's a fact—and yet—

"Catchy tune," whispered Mr. Diamond, determined to be entertained. "She's really a good soul, that woman. Of her class, of course. Clever. And plenty of *grit*. I like *grit*."

"But gimme—the shimme—ow gimme—the shimmy-yimmy-yimmy...." Milady's voice became more wholehearted as she howled for the shimmy. She curled her lips, showed a row of large teeth, and seemed quite sure that the whole audience was with her in her preference. She held out her rocking arms to the audience as though the shimmy were a long-clothes infant which she hoped would be handed to her. She threw her arms round an invisible man and shimmied up and down, singing the chorus over her shoulder to a tune that made all feet dance except Mr. and Mrs. Lorne's. The two French railwaymen began to stamp quite enthusiastically. Instead of singing the second verse, Milady left it to the piano while she invited some one to come up and shimmy with her.

"Ow come on do, one of you gentlemen.... Ah'm lonely.... This lil old song gives me feet the fair itch—worse than corns ... come along up and have a turn, do, ... nothing like the shimmy for the rheumatics ... now which of you's going to be a good sport? ... don't all speak at once.... What you all so shy for? Nobody's going to tell tales. ... Now, which of you boys is it going to be?"

All the men laughed uneasily, examining the knees of their trousers. Only Mr. Lorne, strong in righteousness, dared to meet Milady's roguish eye with a direct glance of disapproval. This noble gaze roused the devil in Milady.

"I spy the boy that loves to shimme-ee-ee," she sang and tittuped down the floor, holding her arms out towards Mr. Lorne. "Once more, Lena, on the old tin can, and he'll be another fallen angel.... Ow gimme—the shimme—ow gimme—the shimmy-yimmy-yimmy—"

"Go away please," the calm bass voice of Mr. Lorne could be heard above the relieved gigglings of the other men. Milady's yearning hands were not far from the red ears of her victim, but he bowed his head under her arm and picked up his hat and stick. This gesture quenched the ardour of Milady. "Ow all

right—no call to get ratty, laddie," she said and tittuped away backwards, the sky-blue satin quivering like an irritated horse's skin. "For there's nothing to beat the shimmy-yimmy-yimmy for gurls—and—boys." She struck a final attitude, trying to bite her petulance in behind her grinning teeth.

"A very catchy tune. Very catchy indeed. Quite delightfully catchy," murmured Mr. Diamond tactfully.

Mr. Lorne stood patiently and sternly over his wife who, in stooping to pick up her umbrella, dropped her bag, and, in stooping to pick up her bag, dropped her umbrella. Her hands were accustomed to holding babies and saucepans and family bibles—not society things like umbrellas and beaded bags. This delay enabled Edna to step hastily forward and sing about beauty, duty, God and the sod. Mr. Lorne hardly cared to dissociate himself from these ennobling substances and abstractions by walking out of the room. He sat down in a deliberately temporary attitude on the edge of his chair. As Milady again came forward, he sprang up like a startled hare, but she said, "Now people dear, I've bin naughty, 'aven't I, and I'm not going to do it no more. I'm going to sing a song that couldn't give offence to an unborn babe. It's called—'My Daddy.'"

"Oh my God!" said Lion, covering his face with his hands.

She turned her toes in to give an impression of innocent childishness, put her head on one side and plucked at the side-seams of the blue satin with her fingers.

"He's such a vewy gweat big man—an' I'se so vewy small," she began through round puckered lips, fixing an innocent wide-eyed stare on little Mr. Lorne. "An' when I is a naughty gel—he don't love me at all. I'll twy to be a good li'I gel—the goodest gel I can—an' then he'll smile his gweat big smile—my gweat big Daddy-man."

Mr. Lorne felt most uncomfortable. He could not escape the blank ambiguous beam of her eye. His cloak of dignified wrath seemed stripped from him. The grounds for protest were cut from under his feet.

"I'll give my Daddy one big kiss—and climb upon his knee—so's he won't never fwown again—at naughty littol me——"

There was a crash of discords. Lena fell suddenly forward, her forehead on the keys. "Oh, I can't—I can't ..."

Milady's eyes seemed suddenly to shrink from wide innocence to narrow coldness. "Whatever's the matter *now*?" she asked over her shoulder. She forgot to turn her toes out again.

"I'm ill—I can't breathe ..." gasped Lena. They all stood round the piano, looking at Lena with embarrassment and excitement. Mr. Diamond, his helpful mind upon brandy, shouted, "Boy!"

"She must get to bed," said the doctor. "How'll I get her all the way up that hill to the hospital in this downpour...?"

"Oh of course she must come to us," said Daley. "It's only a few steps. Clifford and Lion could easily carry her there."

Clifford and Lion plaited their fingers together and lifted her between them, one glad it was Lena and the other sorry it was not Daley. Lena's arms were round their necks. She was crying and could not reach her handkerchief.

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"Well I never," said Milady irritably. Edna was putting the music together. Mr. Diamond mingled sympathy with praise. "Such a breezy entertainment," he said. "Perfectly delightful. Perf—fect—tly delight—tful.... How sad it should end like this. Never mind. Let's hope it's just a slight feverish attack induced by the rain. That's what it is no doubt. Not a doubt of that."

The doctor followed the invalid hopefully. The white inhabitants of Kan Lu Pa were monotonously healthy. Even a mild case of congestion of the lungs—under Blond Nordic ribs—would be a change from these eternal tumorous Chinks.

The open relentless sound of the rain made the bedroom wretched as Daley and Mrs. Lorne helped Lena to take off her clothes. "I can manage—I can manage," said Lena huskily, not wishing Daley to see her thin body. But when at last she lay between the sheets, she let her anxious muscles go and said, "Oh, how glorious—to be still.... It's like a throne. I'm strong again now...." She never expressed enthusiasm except when she had been in pain. The ceasing of pain, she often thought, was her only real physical joy.

CHAPTER III

Ah, nobody knows

The thing I would learn

But the star of the frost

That is still in the night for a while

And is burned in the morning and lost.

So would I be frozen,

So would I be burned

Into silence

And lost;

So would I return—

Not I—not I—

But a wind from the wild,

Besieging the blossoming

Towers of the roses.

"I have get home," said Mrs. Lorne, "because of painting Aggie's throat."

"Clifford'll see you home," said Daley. "Your niece will be all right here. I'll put a little bell...."

Clifford looked rather wildly at his wife. "Offering me," he thought, "as though I were a pony. Married to an American, as Mother says, a man can't call his soul his own."

But few men called their souls their own so literally as did Clifford. He had his initials stamped on his soul, as he had them stamped on his notepaper and his pocketbook, painted on his diningroom chairbacks, engraved on his front door plate, appliquéed on the backs of his coolies' tunics, embossed upon his penwipers, embroidered on his sweaters and handkerchiefs. His whole house was spotted with C.C.C.s. C.C.C. expressed something that he felt a very urgent craving to express. It sealed him, somehow, as a man. He would always be in danger of losing his consciousness of existence, if he should forget C.C.C.

He found himself walking under the dripping trees with Mrs. Lorne, in the shaft of light from the coolie's lantern. At any rate, he thought, he would be able to say the word *Lena* several times during the walk. How valuable names are! It is no wonder that the Holy Name can reverse magic. Every name is a little holy; every name is a sanctuary from encroaching magic. His own name—Christopher Clifford Cotton—how solid—how safe!

Mrs. Lorne, who spent every minute regretting the last minute, was ashamed to have referred selfishly to her own family affairs in leaving her niece's sickroom. She had become accustomed to the concealment of her family affairs because she thought so incessantly of her dead baby, Bertie, and naturally she could not speak aloud the thought, "Bertie, Bertie, Bertie," ... which, for hours together, would be the only thought in her mind.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Lorne through trembling lips, "I ought to have sat up with Lena and left Aggie's throat in God's hands."

"Oh Lena ... Lena won't be alone," said Clifford, and as he spoke he thought, "Perhaps I shall be with her." He stammered as he added, "Don't worry about Lena, Mrs. Lorne. You ought to go back to your baby. Don't babies have to be given their mothers' milk, or something, every few hours?"

Mrs. Lorne was so much hurt by this remark that her mind rebounded from it and she began to worry confusedly over the fact that she was wearing her best frock with the V and the black sequins, and that the mud was very deep and the drippings from the trees very penetrating. She hitched up her skirt a little higher and then remembered forgivingly what Clifford had said. "I have no baby now, Mr. Cotton," she replied mildly.

"Oh no—I forgot. It is dead, isn't it. I suppose you cried over that a good deal, didn't you?"

"I tried not to—being God's will I did not wish to seem to repine."

"But why not, if you *did* repine? Why should you hide things like that from God? Can't He stand a little criticism?"

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"God knows best," said Mrs. Lorne, brushing blasphemy away as though it were a fly near her nose. God knew best, she was sure. Evidently the best for Bertie had been a Christian burial. Certainly no wisdom less than God's would have found a reason for thrusting a body of such loveliness as the body of Mrs. Lorne's little baby under the wormy earth. The coarse short-sighted human view would certainly have been that the baby deserved to live—if only for the extraordinarily beautiful dimples in his little behind. This was simply another proof that God knew best. God had seen fit in His infinite wisdom to remind Mrs. Lorne that the apparently perfect body of Bertie was but dust and to dust must return. And to dust it had indeed returned, a thing that Mrs. Lorne, who had given that perfect body its bath every night, would never have thought possible.

"God's best," said Clifford, "seems to be rather a dangerous thing from man's point of view. If any one else invented it, you'd almost call it the worst."

"Please don't talk like that, Mr. Cotton, though only a faulty woman and no education to speak of—man can only take such a very small view and learning through sorrow to trust in a wisdom so infinitely superior to one's own."

"Well of course you haven't much wisdom, have you?" agreed Clifford frankly. "Not like your niece Lena who is so wonderfully wise. I could easily trust in her. Trust in human wisdom seems so much safer to me than trust in the other kind. That other kind seems to be so often abused by the Trustee. But that of course, I suppose you would say, is what makes it so very creditable to trust. You never know what may come of it—and that is called Faith, isn't it? A little more trust, Mrs. Lorne, and you may be left a penniless and childless widow. Why not try putting your trust in princes for a change?"

"I cannot bear to hear you speak in this way, Mr. Cotton," said Mrs. Lorne in an unusually strong voice. "How small—how ridiculously small such chatter seems to me—how little and puffed up with pride——"

"How little—how little!" chanted Clifford. "Yes, that's what is so safe—littleness. Magic is so calamitously big—gods live in such a big world. Littleness is man's triumph and—oh, he doesn't know how lucky he is—to live in a little tight world that he can't get lost in...."

He stopped and laid a heavy hand on Mrs. Lorne's trembling arm. "This bamboo grove belongs to God, Mrs. Lorne. This enormous snare of haunted air and brushing leaves belongs to God—to magic—to the fairies. But how much safer you'd be at home, suckling your baby—alone with bodies under a man-built roof. And how much safer I'd be with my arms about the wise body of——"

"You have been drinking, Mr. Cotton," said Mrs. Lorne, tossing his hand away. "I do not wish for your company, though very good of Mrs. Cotton to suggest it and I can see the light on my own verandah from here, the coolie being quite sufficient protection, thank you. I will try to forget your very strange behaviour owing no doubt to strong drink, and I think Mr. Cotton if you will forgive me saying so you would do well to pray to God to overlook it too. Who are you that you should set yourself up——"

"Who am I? I am Christopher Clifford Cotton. Christopher Clifford Cotton..."

But she was gone. She dwindled down the path, and the dancing light of the lantern made her seem to dance along on her thin legs and large goloshes.

Clifford looked about him in the darkness. "Christopher Clifford Cotton," he whispered, as though it were a spell. "A man—a printer—a husband—perhaps to be a lover.... I'm quite safe. I'm not a changeling now. I'm a man—only half a mile from home...."

But all the grove was prickly with sound. All the dim dark sky was slashed with the sharp leaves of the bamboos. He began to run homeward, his big clumsy feet slipping in the mud. Something essential was escaping from him. His brain was like a cage with an open door; the winged prisoner within was aware of the path to freedom—the prisoner was poised to fly.

Desperately Clifford clutched at all that he knew of himself. "I'm a man—a man—a man—going home through a common wet forest.... I'm Christopher Clifford Cotton—going home...."

The gaze of his mind's eye was concentrated on the memory of the monogram, C.C.C., embroidered on his handkerchiefs, surrounded by a little embroidered ring. "The ring is round me, if I can only remember it.... I am safe in my ring—I am safe in my body—I am a man—a man—a man—safe in my hard body...."

But his identity was slipping away from him—escaping like water running out of a pool. He could not regain familiarity with his man's body. He saw that body ridiculously—a puffed-up pillar of matter enclosed in a bladder of skin—re-inforced by coarse complicated bones that moved on pulleys of elastic—a pillar topped by a knob of flesh and bone and marrow. He lost sight of the dignity and beauty of human faces; eyes were but glazed holes—lips but the ingenious trimming of a necessary slit—noses but the outleaning nozzles of inner tubes.... Where was the loveliness of man?

A little square light suddenly looked between the trunks of two trees. A window—a window, squared by the clever hands of men. And behind the window—a lamp, lighted by the wise prosaic thoughts of men. The fairies, like moths, were drawn into that flame to destruction; all the fairies and terror of the night were drawn in and burned to nothing by the wise flames of man. The forest broke, like an unsuccessful spell. He was nearly home. The spiders' webs and the leaves might lash like little whips across his face—he was nearly home. There was the roof of his home against the sky—thwarting the rapacious sky. There was the man-made peak to which the endangered changeling must lift up his eyes for help....

And as he reached the abrupt edge of the grove, he realised that the sky had cleared and that the moonlight was bright. His shadow rose up by his side on the bank as he came out of the grove. "A good shadow," he thought gloriously. "As good as a bishop's.... In a minute I shall be safe—as safe as a bishop...." He held his body erect; it tingled with returning safety. He kept unwinking eyes fixed upon the shadow as it bowed and bounded along the tufts of the herbaceous border.

And his shadow stood still against the creepers outside Lena's low, dimly-lighted window.

Safe ... safe ... safe....

CHAPTER IV

Puppies see low.
No higher
Do their dreams go
Than the toes of trees,
Than the ankles of men,
Than the knees
Of nettles.
They aspire
To attune their tongues
To the taste of boots,
Their noses
To the smell of spiders,
Their lungs
To a kitchen breeze.
They know why
The worms coil.
They know when
The ants pause.
For them the cricket's prose is
A sonnet of fire.
For them the snails write
Sufficient laws
Across the seamed
And crumpled soil.
But they tire
Of their knowledge soon.
Their wisdom settles
At the world's roots.

Their eyes toil

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Not up the rungs
Of light.
For them the hanging fruit's
Frail globe encloses
No jewelled spoil.
For them the late bird's tune
Is the song of a liar.
And of the flowery sky
The puppies know
Only the petals
Of fallen roses
That in the dung's
Foul quicksand lie—
Unseated riders
Of steeds undreamed,
Of winged steeds that fly
About the oblivious moon.

Daley put everything helpful that she could think of within reach of Lena's hand, sent one coolie to fetch Lena's possessions from the hospital and another to light the path of Mrs. Lorne and Clifford, and then went to her own room. She read the *Woman's Helpful Friend* for an hour, enjoying a mild love—story. America was built round her like a wall. The possible tinkling of a bell that she had placed by the queer Lena's bedside was the only thread that might jerk her back to China. No ghosts of China haunted her walled fortress—not even her changeling husband. One never knew where Clifford was unless he was here. Perhaps he was walking in the bamboo grove in the rain. He never would be long away from trees. He would come in soon and they would talk of Lena's illness. Clifford loathed illness. He would never again credit Lena with wisdom now, Daley thought.

She sighed and her attention wandered from the love-story to the husbands in the advertisements. Husbands certainly haunted the advertisement columns of the *Woman's Helpful Friend*; the acquiring of husbands—the feeding of husbands—the home education of husbands—the deodorising of husbands—the amusement of husbands—the insurance of husbands—the burying of husbands.... The advertisements did not offend her. She could never understand why old Mrs. Cotton snorted so angrily over them. They were just advertisements, anyway. She would have admitted that the advertisement—
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husband, though excellent as far as he went, had never "come into her life." But that might be because she had married an Englishman. English husbands, one had to take for granted, were different. English husbands, it seemed, were not made of the stuff that takes Home Correspondence Courses in Salesmanship and comes home saying, "Look Betty—a 75 per cent increase in salary!" An English husband whose wife said, "Isn't it superfluous, old man, not superfloous?" would not, Daley felt instinctively, allow the experiment to be repeated—even if the object of the correction were the laudable one of persuading him to read a book called *Talking Right* and so become Welcome in the Homes of Men Who Have Made Good. It was with a certain wistfulness that Daley studied the sketch of a husband surveying his wife who had proved her worth by buying a Home Vacuum Cleaner out of her savings. "Isn't he just *proud* of her!" "If he is, he's certainly nothing like Clifford." No vacuum cleaner could bring that radiance to the eye of an English husband. But what about American husbands? Somehow advertisers assumed that the last word about American husbands was said by them—but was it? Mr. Ridley, for instance, detested Krusty-Chumps the Ideal Breakfast Food, though the advertisement said, "Just feed it to him once—and you'll see." Mrs. Ridley *had* fed it to him once, and she *had* seen. Mr. Ridley did not allow Mrs. Ridley to use rouge—though the advertiser of Butiz-Gleem said, "Twenty Years Married—and He still has Eyes Only For Her." Mrs. Ridley had once followed the example of the wife in the picture called, "Now that He's Getting On in the World—are you Sure Your Home is Fit to Receive Important Guests? Buy a Hyjeenik-Pivot Toilet Seat." But Mr. Ridley had called the thing one of these crazy newfangled notions and had had the man call and fetch it away again that very day. Yet Mr. Ridley was certainly a Hundred Per Cent American Husband. It was a pity, if the American advertisement—husband was a false picture, that it should be the one most persistently displayed before the sneering eyes of old Mrs. Cotton and other foreigners. The thing was, of course, that they were sneering at the *ideal* of domestic goodness; it didn't matter whether the *picture* was a true one or not—it was what lay behind the picture that they sneered at. The *ideal* certainly was American—whether the advertiser's expression was accurate or not. Mr. Ridley certainly fulfilled the spirit of the advertisement-husband if not the letter. And what was there to sneer at in the *ideal*—in kindness—in domestic enthusiasm—in a busy man's wish for Five Minutes a Day with the Great—in Daddy's Heart-hunger for his Home-nest? Surely these things in themselves were good—even if the words seemed silly. How did foreigners get on without them? "I'm a foreigner now," thought Daley. "So I ought to know. I have to get on without them." The advertisement of Daddy and Junior sailing boats in the Ideal Bathroom glowed before her wistful eyes. "What's wrong with it, anyway? What is there to sneer at in being good and loving and hygienic? Why did Lion say 'My God' about that song 'My Daddy'? A cunning little kiddie coaxing her Daddy is a cuter notion anyday than a bunch of great husky English-men killing a fox, like in Lion's silly old prints...."

After an hour or so she heard her dog Josephine whining. She went out on the verandah and found Josephine panting, wheezing, moaning, twitching, trying to make a nest for herself under a wet canvas chair.

"My One, have you forgotten Queen Charlotte's Lying-in-Kennel?" They went to the kennel but Josephine did not like the look of it. It was too public and too hygienic. Daley went to fetch a bowl of water and while she was away Josephine decided that she had found the Ideal Home under the water-butt. Josephine intended to keep this new home a secret even from Daley, but in spite of herself she yelped. So Daley found her and was rather hurt.

"But dearest, we agreed weeks ago that the kennel was just wunnerful."

She murmured both sides of the argument as she bent over the protesting Josephine. "Oh mum, let me stay where I am.... No, my One, it's for your good...." She pulled Josephine out, while the rain splashed on her hair. "My Lawd—did I scrape her against that pipe? Have I hurt the puppies?" She carried the heavy Josephine to the Perfect Kennel and laid her on the straw. Josephine lay gasping and wheezing, moving her head unhappily and her legs spasmodically. "Do dogs ever die in puppy-birth?"

"Don't you worry, mum, just keep calm and don't look. I'll be all right," said Josephine in Daley's mind.

Josephine raised her head. Her body was bent like a bow and released. She gave a high cry. There was suddenly a black puppy lying on the straw and in a moment it began moving like a worm, making a little sniggering noise. It seemed to Daley that the puppy had been blown like a bubble or launched like a ship. "How easy and how glorious," she thought. "I simply *must* have a baby. I won't die without having a baby." The next puppy was black and white with a very red nose and very pink palms to its paws. The third was black again. "Good Josie—good clever Josie," said Daley; the success of the affair seemed so wonderful to her. Josephine licked the three puppies rather roughly for several minutes before the fourth was born. It was sand-coloured with a black face. Josephine was exhausted but excited. Daley imagined that her dog was laughing and crying and that the world was going round before her eyes. The puppies all fastened themselves to Josephine's teats in an absurd row.

"Now be very still and calm, my One. And if you want me, whine and I'll come in a minute...."

She gave her dog some milk in a saucer and when the saucer was empty she took it indoors to the pantry. As she went to her bedroom door from the pantry, the door of Lena's room opened and Clifford came out. They looked at each other for a few seconds and then Daley walked past him, in a strange calm silence, to her room. She was so very much astonished that she could not believe that anything remarkable had happened. The abruptness and the simplicity of the encounter made it seem like a thing that could be explained in one minute and forgotten in two. Homes are not broken so quietly and so quickly. Perhaps Lena had been seized with pain again and had cried out for help. Or perhaps Clifford had just gone in to say goodnight—not knowing that other women's husbands don't seek wisdom like that at half past twelve at night. Or perhaps her doorhandle had come off on the inside as it did once before, and she had wanted it fixed. But why had Clifford said nothing to Daley in the passage? There was no use in asking why. She knew quite certainly what had happened. There seemed to be a tight band across her breast and she could hear her pulse beating in her ears with a soft crushing sound.

"*That* must have been it—no, not *that* not *that*... Lena was in pain and cried out for help."

She went into Clifford's dressingroom. There was a bed in it and on the bed Clifford now lay.

"Clifford," cried Daley on a strangled note quite different from the note she had aimed at. Clifford did not answer. He was apparently asleep. He lay on his side and the loose flesh of his face drooped a little towards the pillow.

"Clifford—Clifford—Clifford!" Daley shook his shoulder. He made no answering movement. He would not open his eyes though his expression became conscious and stubborn.

Daley went back to her room. Her mind was frozen with astonishment. "This can't be the end of happiness—this—without a sound!" There was no feeling of end in the air. On the contrary, four new

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puppies were in the kennel outside. "The second black one looked a little feeble," thought Daley, and then—"Why, if I can think of puppies, that shows I don't care one way or the other. The horrible thing is that nothing's changed. The horrible thing is that the puppies *are* there—that nothing has died or fallen to pieces ... there's no break between happy life and being forsaken. What shall I do? What does one do when one's home is broken? What would Mrs. Ridley do? What do the people who write for advice to the Heart-to-heart Column do? At any rate for the first hour or two? Cry? Laugh? Rage? Turn on the Victrola? Christen puppies?"

"Boniface, Innocent, Clement and Pius," said Daley aloud. "I'll name them like that—it would continue the papal tradition that darling Gregory started." It was as if she could hear the light gushing voice of her own mind throwing words into a dangerous silence.

"Oh my dear—four of the cutest little pups. I'll name the black and white one Boniface and the yellow one—the girl—Innocent.... Funny they're not born in spring like lambs. Dogs are like us—no special baby-season. But you'd say it must be easiest to have babies in the spring. Ah—Clifford—Clifford—I shall never have your baby now...."

She was not one of those women who face trouble dry-eyed. As soon as she was sorry for herself she cried, and now, as the dreadful word *forsaken* occurred to her again, she threw herself on her bed and cried violently aloud. She wounded herself afresh every moment by remembering the word *forsaken* and by recalling incidents from the time when she was safe. She cried almost with a deliberate feeling of washing a hurt in a satisfactory stream of tears. For, all the time, she secretly expected to wake in the morning to find her love, like her garden, still flowering safely in a new sun.

She could no more easily stop crying than she could have stopped laughing a few hours before. "It's so unfair. It's so unfair. I who am so anxious not to hurt people and so anxious to be pleasing. Lion loves me and Mr. Diamond likes me and the doctor laughs at what I say and that darling kind solicitor who managed my legacy said there ought to be more like me and the man who fixed my passport said he wished he could see me again—and I so faithful all the time to these Cottons with hard hearts...."

She spent minutes in hating Lena. She imagined Lena's mean voice stung at last to life, asking for something, pleading for a gift.... "No *never*," sobbed Daley, "*Never, never, never, never*." Or perhaps contemptuous consent would hurt her most. "Very well then—take it—you bitch—I'd despise to have among my possessions anything that *you* could want.... Yes—yes—I despise to grieve for a man that has lain in *your* thin arms...."

She slept very heavily and stormily and awoke now and then with a feeling that she must hunt for something that she was afraid to find. But each time, when she remembered what was the trouble that she must seek, she cried because she would never again know peace. Peace, which had hidden under the cool green things of her garden, and in the kind eyes and imagined voices of her dogs, and in the wiry romantic sound of the Victrola—the only art she knew—peace was gone out into the fields, wheeling like a bird through the wild empty air; no trap could catch peace again now.

But in the morning she awoke on fire with astonished relief. "Why—what a fool I've bin—and Lena so sick.... Clifford heard her call—of course—while I was out midwifing the puppies.... She wanted hot water or something. I'm sure of it. I'm sure. Clifford'll think nothing of her now—he hates sickness, he'll

hate her now. Why—look at the tears I've wasted.... The night is such a dangerous time to worry in. How lucky that nobody knows what a fool I was!"

But all the same, the Daley who looked out of the mirror as she dressed had a new look—a stealthy look. Daley and her reflection looked at each other with a look that should not pass between friends. That new Daley would not have been quite at home on the Ridleys' porch.

In the diningroom old Mrs. Cotton was alone, jerking out *mm-mm-mm*, as she always did during moments of effort. She was settling herself in a chair at the table. She held her twitching old body poised over the chair for a moment and then took her weight off her sticks and let herself go. It looked very dangerous, but she always refused help. She was always rather feeble in the mornings. In her deep voice there was a flat scraping sound, which cleared away towards warm midday, like a fog.

Daley had with difficulty formed a habit of never saying good morning. Good morning, goodnight, little quick kisses and a good deal of laughter had been left behind in California, when Daley married Clifford. But as she came into the diningroom she very nearly said, "Good morning, darling mother...." For in the night she had been imagining old Mother Cotton kind at last. She had heard the old woman's uneven voice in her mind saying, "Poor little Daley—poor little woman—poor little forsaken love...." That was the way old women over eighty should talk in times of sorrow. Daley's eyes filled with tears of sentiment. She would never learn control. Any other woman would have learned to control love, she thought, not to mention laughter and tears. It is safer to be unkind. Tears rolled down her bright cheeks and one tear was shaken into her scrambled eggs. "What a fool I am!" she thought. "Nothing new has happened to cry about...." She said aloud, "Lena's quite bad, Mother ... I'd better go and see whether she wants anything."

"A sto-homach-ache," shouted old Mrs. Cotton. "Induced by your American tinned poisons last night."

Outside the diningroom door Daley thought of Josephine and, for the moment, deliberately turned her back on Lena.

Josephine was still lying on her side and the four puppies, just as though they had never stopped drinking all night, were closely sucked on to her teats in a row. Josephine's tail made a commotion in the straw as she signalled maternal pride and relief to Daley.

"They're perfectly wunnerful. Perfectly wunnerful.... Aren't you the smart dog to have such wunnerful puppies...."

"They're not too bad, are they, mum?" breathed Josephine, hiding her blushes in a vehement licking of her family. She threw them roughly over on to their backs and licked their stomachs, but still their mouths remained impassively fixed to her teats. They did not mind which way up they sucked. "Say mum, you haven't got such a thing as an ox roasted whole on you, have you? I feel like a sucked orange...."

She ate biscuits and milk while the puppies sucked. Like Baron Munchausen's horse after the portcullis came down, thought Daley. Daley had to stay with her while she ate, for Gregory and Cowslip *were* so interfering. "A Lying-in Kennel is no place for you men-dogs," said Daley, smacking Gregory as he leaned in to sniff sardonically at his young step-brothers and step-sister. Josephine growled in a high thin weak voice. Cowslip, the yellow dog, bowed and shuffled in inquisitive embarrassment at a distance of a few

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yards. Cowslip, having had an unhappy puppyhood, was a dog full of repressions and inhibitions. Anything unexpected was terrifying and shocking to him. He wore his tail tremulously and, if not constantly praised, always imagined blame. One could never joke with Cowslip.

"Has Cowslip noticed that there is only one yellow puppy in his family?" Daley asked Josephine. "The colour question in the dog world really almost does away with the problem—Should a Wife Tell...?"

"It's a dam-silly puppy that knows its own father," said Josephine with her mouth full, licking the plate.

Daley knocked at Lena's door feeling as if she were at the door of another world. The room smelt of creosote. Lena was crying. Her eyes were swollen and she held two soaked handkerchiefs. The hollowness and pallor of her face gave Daley's heart a quick surface thrill of pity. Daley could not bear that Lena should cry and be in pain—even though last night she had prayed that grief might tear Lena in pieces. But that desire had left a kind of unacknowledged triumph underlying Daley's pity, a feeling of secret glory which would have shocked not only the Heart-to-heart Column expert, but also Daley herself, had it been recognised.

Daley noticed that, above the exiguous silk nightdress that barely concealed Lena's thin drooping breasts, there were bones showing—bones leaning away on either side from the breast-bone like feathers from an arrow. "I didn't even know one had ribs up there," thought Daley.

"Darling Lena," said Daley, and her *darling*, like all her darlings, was really spontaneous. "It's perfectly dreadful you should be ill, you poor sad little thing. The doctor'll be here soon. Tell me now just how you feel and what I can do to make you feel more comfortable."

"Oh I'm a wreck," said Lena in a hoarse broken voice. "It's the old pleurisy again, I suppose. I wish it would kill me once and for all...." She covered her face with a handkerchief and turned impatiently over in bed. "Oh, I've got a sword in my side."

Daley was awkward with her hands and entirely at a loss in the matter of touching a body in pain. But she soaked some flannels in boiling water and laid them on the furrowed ribs of the weakly lamenting Lena. Her dislike and distrust became quite clear to her suddenly as she touched Lena's skin. She was quite sure now that within this prostrate and contemptible cage of bones and skin there was a menace for her and a destructive secret.

"I give trouble wherever I go," mourned Lena into the pillow.

"Now—now—now—" said Daley briskly. "Don't talk nonsense." As she went out she could feel strength thrilling through her own fine body and she thought, "Oh poor thing—after all, she was drawing on her little treasure last night, with her wheezy talk about music and freaks and the Labour Party. The little wisdom Clifford thought she had. She was trying to get her share of being flattered—her share of being pleased with herself. She hasn't any other treasure than that silly smart talk to draw on. No body ... no glory...."

"Lena's worse, Clifford. We must send for the doctor again. She was bad last night, wasn't she? You heard her scream. I didn't."

"Yes, I heard her scream last night." And when Daley saw that he would say much more if he were asked, she was timidly silent.

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The doctor thought Daley one of the most charming women he had ever met. The moment he came into a room where she was he began looking at her expectantly, beaming, knowing that she would soon say something that would make him chuckle deliciously.

"Been pinching the precious fingernail again, Mrs. Cliff," asked the doctor. This joke, referring to the fact that Daley had twice pinched the same finger in the same door, was a kind of permanent bridge to conversation between the doctor and Daley. Daley laughed automatically.

"Not again, Doctor dear. Three times would be unlucky. We've got a real honest-to-goodness invalid in the house this time, haven't we?"

All the way along the passage the doctor, as he followed Daley, was watching with an almost silly pleasure her way of walking. For she walked always as though she were just refraining from dancing to an inward tune. Daley filled a niche of tragic romance in the doctor's mind, partly because she was beautiful and partly because he was almost sure that her husband was mad. He was, like many doctors, a materialistic romantic—or a romantic materialist. His prosaic imagination showed him hateful pictures of the married life of Daley and Clifford Cotton.

Lena had been examined by so many doctors in the course of her life that she had a special doctor's manner—the complement to a bedside manner. She described her sensations in a choked and hopeless voice and her manner had a kind of restrained excitement, assumed in order to let the doctor know that her temperature was rather high. Her illness did not interest the doctor. Lena seemed repellent to him. But he used his stethoscope conscientiously, confirmed his first diagnosis—bronchitis and a touch of dry pleurisy—and, while reflecting what a wonderfully good friend Daley was to this friendless puny sniffing creature, added the usual hopeful prophecies of a quick recovery.

"Well, young lady, you've got Mrs. Lorne for a nurse and our Mrs. Cliff for a hostess, and nobody could ask more than that. You're in luck, and that's a fact. Mustn't think of getting about for a week at least...."

After saying goodbye to the doctor on the verandah, Daley came back rather shyly to Lena's room and sat beside the bed. Lena was now much calmer. She was not very ill. She could never attain to a serious illness—could never flatter herself that her life was despaired of, and while she secretly deplored this inadequacy, she laughed at herself for deploring it.

"How odd it must feel," she said to Daley, "to have every man half in love with you. That doctor, for instance ..."

She felt more at ease with women than with men and rather liked saying flattering—even sometimes almost loverlike—things to women.

"Oo well," said Daley, pleased, "he makes me want to pat him on the head and say, 'Never mind, my lambie.' Men are like babies, you know ... they're not a bit wily, as women are...."

Triumphantly she spoke to Lena as though instructing some one who had certainly had no experience. For the moment she was glad to persuade herself that Lena had lacked opportunities to study at first hand the nature of men in love. She erased from her mind her suspicions of Lena as a Homebreaker. She was impelled to show this puny plain woman what it was to be lovely and full of life.

"Do you know," she began again in a rather excited voice, "before I married, I didn't know that men had many different kinds of being-in-love. I used to think that every man who met a girl's eyes again and again across a hotel lobby, for instance, or held her hand in a corner of the porch and said—'Say, how

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d'you make your eyes sparkle that way?' or asked her for just one little kiss coming home from a social—would like to marry that girl. But now I know men more, the surprising thing is that any one ever gets married at all—since nearly all men's ways of being-in-love have nothing to do with marriage at all. Men can love without liking—that's what it is.... Girls can't. If a girl sees a boy that's got a face that makes her want to kiss him, she thinks, 'Gee, but I'd like to marry that boy.' Girls, poor things, can't afford more than one way of being-in-love. It used always to be a great puzzle to me that I always had six boys that wanted to kiss me to one that wanted to marry me. And after you get married, to sixty men that want to hold your hand, maybe there's only one that wants to be your lover and take you away from your husband. Things are different from the movies or the magazine stories, where every kiss and every glowing look means a proposal of marriage around the corner. But that's rather a good thing—if you love your man.... You feel that holding the hands of the others isn't a bit wrong or dangerous...."

"Nobody ever wants to hold my hand," said Lena, looking at her hand gloomily. She instinctively wished to emphasise the fact that she was feeble and unfortunate. She felt cheated because her own experiences had never been of the handholding type—had never created an atmosphere in which "Never mind, my lambie," or "How d'you make your eyes sparkle that way?" had been possible.

"Now kissing's different," continued the infatuated Daley. "I don't believe kissing's right. Not playing the game, as my friend Mr. Ridley says. Kissing's not the right result of a mild kind of being-in-love. It exaggerates a little feeling beyond what the little feeling deserves. I don't allow it. Do you know—that doctor tried to kiss me once.... I was quite upset. He was a little tiny bit stooed, of course. It was Christmas night, after dinner ... the stars were so bright. I was quite worried about it for several days. Of course I told Clifford...."

Lena looked at her astounded. She had not known that such ingenuousness existed, except in schoolrooms at Eastbourne. What pretty puzzled lives some women must lead—and never know wildness or darkness or danger. "I suppose you're too spontaneous ever to fear or suffer very dreadfully," she said. "Spontaneity makes life very safe. Men aren't dragons to you—they're just boys. Emotion never tears you to pieces—it just excites you a little. With me, just arranging my attitude is a painful task. I am terrified of failure—and yet I always fail because I'm not spontaneous. I think beforehand.... I think at the time.... I think afterwards.... I think: 'What must I be now—sisterly? Inscrutable? Intelligent? *Enfant terrible*?' But whichever I choose, it doesn't come off. Even to be the most terrible of *enfants terribles* needs something that I haven't got. I suppose it needs charm. You can't have that by planning beforehand."

"But why bother to plan beforehand?" asked Daley. "Men aren't dragons at all—they're just the simplest things ... and so defenceless.... Any woman could have a little love affair with any man she chose...." Thus she gave voice to a flattering mistake common among not very wise but attractive women, and encouraged by men novelists who write for a feminine public.

"It's not so," said Lena. "For some women all adventures are terrible. For women like me there are no handholdings and chaste kissings on starry porches. Some people can't be lightly alive at all. Strangers are automatically cruel to people like me. One has only to show that one is vulnerable, and ordinary kind men or women will seize the opportunity to wound.... I'm nearly thirty-seven, Daley, and I'm puny and have a haggard face and weak lungs—I've never known any happiness at all in my life and I've never met

gentleness—but I've been brave and I've taken more than life offered me. I've known love—but I've never known it without hatred and suffering as well...."

She looked at Daley's bright eyes and soft eager expression and craved painfully for Daley's interest and comprehension. She must, somehow, pin Daley's interest to herself.

"Charm and little kisses and giggles and fondlings—those are bridges for men to cross by. When they have crossed, you laugh and send them back—knowing they won't mind the walk. But when they cross without a bridge—that's a different matter. They have suffered and sweated in the crossing and they've come for a purpose.... Very few men will cross without a bridge...."

She watched Daley. She wanted to say: "You have had your little gay loves—you have kissed your boys—but you can't keep your man from me...."

"They say," she went on aloud, "that there's a chance for every woman to be loved. For half-women, then, there's a half-chance. I've had all I wanted of love, Daley, though I've never had happy love.... Very few men ask for such a sad thing as wisdom ... very few men want to be lovers of wisdom, but when they do seek wisdom—they don't need stars. Perhaps they escape from stars when they come to me...."

Daley began to say something. "Ah——" she began in a high voice. Then she stood up suddenly and went out of the room.

CHAPTER V

A child among children,
You fled from our chorus,
Your chalice was filled
At the uttermost shore.
Now flee us no more
For your chalice is spilled,
And your altar of glory
Shall never be builded.

"Coo-coo," said Milady archly, looking round the door of Lena's room. "May the gang come in?"

Lena did not reply. She was very much wounded by her own folly in speaking so baldly to Daley. Her consciousness of subtlety was pierced. She had been naïve, which was disgusting to her. Her craving to
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make an impression on Daley at all costs had passed. She thought, "I was only being confidential. Other women are confidential ... while they are brushing their hair—so men say.... I always hurt myself when I open doors. People don't want to hear about my griefs and raptures.... Every one is stupid and unkind.... What made Daley fit the cap like that ...?" But she could never really deceive herself. The school of self-deceit is too happy a school for such as Lena. She knew now that, for some reason she had strangely forgotten, she had wished Daley to guess that she—poor sickly Lena—had stolen Clifford away. "How wrong I was ..." she thought. She often thought herself wrong—superior, but wrong.

"Well, aren't you an old stick-in-the-mud!" said Milady, sitting on the bed. Edna, who had followed Milady, sat on a chair wiping her hot calm face. "I don't know whyever we're here," continued Milady. "You don't want to see us and we don't want to see you—but Edna made me come. It's the proper thing, I suppose—trust Edna to do the proper thing. Tend the sick'n everything. I never was one to hold the basin meself. It isn't the touch of a woman's hand that makes the world go round, not for us gurls, is it? I say, gurls, isn't Diamond a dear? You can always tell a gentleman anywhere—that's what I always say."

She was a brave woman, but she always found it difficult to talk to Lena and Edna. They never made the necessary replies. It felt like filling up an accidental gap on the stage with patter—only life with Lena and Edna was all gap—never a cue.

"But when you get 'im alone ... You'd be surprised ..." sang Milady, a little at a loss in the silence. She jumped off the bed with a babyish spring and began walking round the room, her high heels clicking desultorily on the polished floor as she stopped in front of first one thing and then another. "Art-paintings in gilt frames," she said. "Done by hand, too, just fancy! Golly, gurls, printing the Holy Word seems to be a paying job. Those rugs come from Tientsin. A boy I met in Shanghai's got a big one; they cost money.... Look at these towels, too—finest Turkish.... Some people have all the luck." The only thing that moved Milady to abstract questioning was the matter of money. She felt that she deserved money, and indeed she did. The vitality in her was certainly worthy of support. She saw no reason why Daley should have gilt-framed art-paintings done by hand and herself none. As a rule Milady lived under the influence of a kind of spiritual delirium, but the thought of the unfair distribution of comforts always recalled her to a pained sobriety for a few moments. It was her only reflection and, as a rule, the only comment she made on it was, "Well, gurls—(or boys)—it's a queer world...."

To Edna the world was not in the least queer. It was made entirely of substances—hard earth—rain that made you wet and sun that made you sweat—food—foreign countries—cinema palaces—people who talked umpteen to the dozen. Nearly everything that people said was just talk, but sometimes they said that they had a married sister in Brixton too—now wasn't that a coincidence!—or that Mary Pickford was simply too sweet as Little Lord Fauntleroy—or that they found So-and-so Cream wonderful for a greasy skin—or that you never knew where you were with these airyoplanes ... and then Edna's soul awoke within her. She was, however, perfectly patient with people who did not say these things but talked high-brow or finance or politics—in a word, umpteen to the dozen. "Live and let live," said Edna, and she was better at letting live than she was at living.

Mrs. Lorne, coming in to nurse her niece Lena, hopped on one foot noisily into the room. She did not, of course, mean to hop or to make any noise, but her heel was caught in a concealed hole in her petticoat.

There was only one slightly sinful thing about Mrs. Lorne, and that was that she was apt to neglect mending where it didn't show.

"Upsi-daisy!" said Milady, holding her up.

With the opening of the door came in the sound of Daley's Victrola playing in the garden. The sound made Lena hope for a minute. "Was I mistaken? Did I not hurt her after all?" Then she remembered, "After all, to Americans, gramophones don't necessarily mean jollity. Perhaps she's comforting herself by listening to America...."

"Mrs. Cotton said to walk right in," said Mrs. Lorne, snarling her humble snarl at Milady as she recovered from her stumble. "I couldn't come before, what with Lettie cutting her hand on the butter tin, but so glad to have this chance of doing something for my sister's girl. And Mrs. Cotton said to come right in and would it worry you dearie if she played a little on the Kreisler, and I said no of course not, dear Mrs. Cotton, a pleasure."

"To her that really is Kreisler playing," said Lena fretfully. "The day of real Kreislers is over."

"Of course, dear, of course," said Mrs. Lorne. "Why surely, isn't that a talking machine that I hear in the distance? Does *that* noise bother you, dear girlie?"

"Only morally," replied Lena.

Mrs. Lorne was pleased to feel that she and her niece found unexpected agreement here. To her there was something definitely immoral in gramophones, aeroplanes, telephones, and the wonders of the radio. These things could not be understood by the normal mind; they could not be fitted into that changeless order of things that was called Right Living. To her the gramophone seemed such a good imitation of music that it was shocking. "How they can think of such things I can't imagine...." Really, modern people had no right to be so clever. In Mrs. Lorne's young days, people recognised that only God worked miracles. Nobody was so godless as to say or do things that a person couldn't understand. Of course there was Mr. Darwin and there were also well-countenanced marvels like the steam-engine. But Mr. Darwin was simply an atheist and could be dismissed from a Christian mind. While as for the steam-engine, one could explain it in a minute by referring to the lid of a tea-kettle—or was it an apple falling off a tree?

She turned to Lena and spoke in her brightest and most minimising voice. She had about five different voices which she deliberately assumed at different times for various altruistic or moral purposes. "Now you mustn't think your illness is serious, dearie, me being sent for to nurse you, the doctor simply thinking it would help Mrs. Cotton. But you're not really ill at all. Oh no no no no no...."

"I wouldn't care a damn if I were," said Lena.

"This bronchial catarrh always affects the spirits," said Mrs. Lorne in bright apology to Milady, who, she thought, might perhaps not have heard the word damn before. Having taken off her hat with hurried, desperate movements, she sought a suitable piece of furniture to put it on. It did not look right anywhere, and she walked about the room, snarling patiently, offering it to various tables and pegs.

"I don't suppose you're overjoyed to find me and Edna here, Missis Missionary," said Milady. "You an' your family's merry laughter didn't exactly take the roof off at our show last night, did it? I got the cold

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shivers every time I looked at your good man. He didn't ought to have sat in the front row with a face like that on him. He looked about as gay as a seasick rabbit. No offence meant."

"And none taken I'm sure," said Mrs. Lorne automatically, though a little dubiously. "My husband has a very strong sense of the ludicrous and often keeps the whole table in a roar at home, but misunderstanding in advance the kind of entertainment you had in mind he said frankly it was a mistake to take tickets, and thank God he didn't take the children too. That was what he said, if you'll forgive me speaking bluntly, he being the last man in the world to judge his fellow-sinners harshly, and every one must live, of course."

"That's what I say, live and let live," said Edna eagerly, and Milady added, "I don't come and laugh at your psalm-singing beans, so what call have you to come and cry at my show? Fair's fair all the world over."

"Well I'm sure——" began Mrs. Lorne, but was stopped by the discovery that she was sure of nothing. "I think you ought to leave my patient now, ladies, though a kindly meant visit and no doubt cheered her up."

"Come on, Tubby," said Milady to Edna. "Never stay when you're asked to go—that's my motto. Bye-bye, Lena, pull yourself together. The gang's got to get a move on to-morrow ... funds are down at zero, let me tell you, and nobody ever screwed a living out of this Consumptive Carrie act."

"Camphorated oil ..." murmured Mrs. Lorne when she was alone with her patient. "Camphorated oil ..." She bowed short-sightedly over tables calling softly, "Camphorated oil ..." and once, by mistake, "Consumptivated oil," but there was no reply.

She went to seek Daley. She entered the drawingroom so tentatively that you would have thought that she expected to find Clifford having a bath there. Actually she found old Mrs. Cotton saying, "Hok—hak—rum—gruh—hok" to herself and levering the fire-irons with her two canes, like a switchman in a signal box.

"Oh excuse me—excuse me," said Mrs. Lorne, making a kind of dancing step backwards. "Nursing my niece and a brisk rubbing with camphorated oil, the breathing so much obstructed."

"She's in love—hok," shouted old Mrs. Cotton. The snarl was frozen on Mrs. Lorne's lip.

"Ah, of course—of course—I mean, I was not aware of any such thing, but of course liable to increase catarrhal congestion if so. But a brisk rubbing——"

"Love and cat-a-harrh," said old Mrs. Cotton. "Ask Daley for the American psychological connection."

"Certainly. Certainly I will," said Mrs. Lorne, flustered.

"She'll explain it in a slo-hogan."

"No doubt—no doubt. She is always so kind. But do you think she would lend me the tiniest drop of camph——"

"Kindness. Don't speak of her kindness. It's all part of the disease."

Mrs. Lorne gulped. She breathed a little prayer for patience, but her impatience would never have been dangerous—or even perceptible. Old Mrs. Cotton played a kind of spellicans with the fire-irons, trying to restore them to their places with her two canes. But her hand was not steady enough; she played the game too fiercely. It was a shockingly noisy game for one so old and so infirm.

"I am nursing my niece," began Mrs. Lorne again. "She wants——"

"My son has what she wants."

"Oh indeed! And is your son——"

"He is no-hot my son."

"Really? Excuse me.... I thought...."

"He belongs to the fairies."

Mrs. Lorne sighed. "I am not clever enough for these people," she thought. She longed to be back in the mission living-room, reading to Lettie and Aggie about the Good Sower. But duty turned her steadfast face towards camphorated oil.

"My niece is in bed with——"

"Hak—hak—hak!" laughed old Mrs. Cotton in a dreadful cracked voice. "Yes ... and last night too...."

Mrs. Lorne sat up and breathed quickly as a mother bird might breathe as the harrow approaches her nest. A patient of Mrs. Lorne's automatically became, as it were, an egg under Mrs. Lorne's wing.

"Woman, what are you saying?" she exclaimed in a pinched undignified voice.

"What *is* she saying?" asked Daley at the door. But it was obvious to Daley, after a moment's glance at the two old women, that Mrs. Cotton had been behaving in a way that justified the strong term *Woman*. Mrs. Cotton's head, never still, was jerking backwards now rather than forwards—a sure sign that she intended to annoy. The eyes of Mrs. Lorne bulged with shock and were wet round the rims. The lip of Mrs. Lorne was caught up by distress; it shewed her chattering teeth, as a rising theatre curtain discloses the feet of dancers.

"I am very sorry," began Mrs. Lorne. Apology was her instinctive medium, but she was so much affronted that she actually gave a kind of edge to her apology. "I'm so sorry that my sister's only child should be where she is not welcome; not having met my niece since she was born I cannot say, but my sister often wrote such a fine spirit though a martyr to chronic bronchitis and usually appreciated wherever she goes...."

"Why Mrs. Lorne ..." began Daley, prompted by the Ridley instinct. The Riddleys never allowed tears to fall uncomforted. But the long hours of grievous doubt that Lena's presence had caused her quickened to a sudden pang that interrupted her. She stood, with her lips apart, not knowing what to say, and looked at Lena's aunt. "People would never have nieces," thought Daley, "if they knew what grief their nieces would give to other people's daughters." Mrs. Lorne's damp eyes, her quivering chin, her pale confused words like sheep huddling out of a narrow gate, all shewed her pain. But it was not the direct appreciation of pain that caught Daley's tenderness; there was no reason in her compassion. Simply Daley was dazzled by a vision of the gentle Mrs. Lorne's days—a vision of Mrs. Lorne combing her sleek

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thin hair over those pads in the morning, anxiously and humbly seeking encouragement from her reflection in the mirror, hairpins between those trembling lips; a vision of Mrs. Lorne kneeling to a horsehair chair, praying for a pure heart, of Mrs. Lorne nibbling mutton hash to keep life in her chaste tired body—eating the fat and the gristle because of her careful early training—, of Mrs. Lorne in bed at night, bent into a kangaroo attitude, wondering if she had offended any one during the day.... Humiliation can sometimes leave pity cold. The fall of a feather of vanity can be too light to assail our ears, but, to the tender-hearted, the perilous uneven flight of the feather is sometimes illogically appealing, and we, who might almost have rejoiced to see it fallen, are constrained to lend our breath to set it bounding to the sun.

Somehow the vision of Mrs. Lorne in bed conquered Daley. "Her heart," she thought, "could very easily be broken...."

"Why, Mrs. Lorne *dear*," she began again aloud. "What in the world has that bad old Mother Cotton bin saying to you? Now I'll tell you.... Your niece Lena is a wunnerful woman—we all think so—I think so—Mother Cotton thinks so—my husband thinks so. I certainly do feel a boob beside her—I couldn't talk so smart as she does—not in a hundred years. And the trouble was that my husband thought the same way and—well—I didn't like that much.... You can't tell me I'm the first wife that's lost her temper over a little thing like that.... It doesn't amount to a row of beans, anyway, and it doesn't make a scrap of difference to our appreciating your niece for what she is—a wunnerful woman. And now there's Clifford flouncing off to the Press to work his bad temper out of his system, and there's your niece going to get perfectly well in a few days in this fine sunny weather—and, believe me, the whole business isn't worth another word—certainly not another tear."

Mrs. Lorne snarled hopefully at her comforter. "Well I'm sure," she began but her face fell. A glance at old Mother Cotton reminded her of outrageous things.

"You mustn't listen to Mother Cotton," said Daley, inflexibly sprightly. "She broods over things and gets ideas in her head."

To get ideas in the head at once appealed to Mrs. Lorne as dangerous. Mr. Lorne got them sometimes. And Lena certainly shewed a tendency.... Mrs. Lorne felt undeniably comforted. Evidently the whole trouble was simply a matter of this immoral old woman getting ideas in her head. Mrs. Lorne even began to anticipate with a vague pleasure breaking her rule about the concealment of family affairs, and writing a confidential letter to Dorothea Willie, her intimate friend in Cardiff, about the interesting offshoots and relations of the Lorne family—perhaps just making casual reference to Lettie's clever enquiries about whether angels lived behind the moon, but chiefly dwelling on irresistible Lena, Mrs. Lorne's own sister's child. "Lena is very reserved," she would write—and she visualised *reserved* with a double s—"I remember her mother—my sister—used to say she took after the Tomkinses in that. But from little things her mother let slip, I know that Lena is very much admired by the gentlemen—what dear Aunt Rhoda used to call the fatal gift of charm—and the impression she has made in this community of lonely exiles—mostly gentlemen—is really sometimes quite embarrassing...." Dear Dorothea Willie, how she would envy Mrs. Lorne the possession of such interesting relations ... such affiliations with the dashing young.... She herself had no children—well—what a thing to say!—of course she had none ... dear Dorothea was not married....

"Hak-hak-hak!" suddenly shouted old Mrs. Cotton. Her hand, the movements of which she could only spasmodically control, moved so slowly and with so much difficulty towards her face that the eyes of Daley and of Mrs. Lorne were obliged to follow it. But when her hand reached her face it curved like a claw over her mouth to cover a leering smile. The smile shewed between the crooked fingers like a little savage thing in a cage. "Hak-hak-hak!" laughed old Mrs. Cotton.

"Don't take any notice of her," said Daley uneasily. "She's a bad old lady. Now Mrs. Lorne, is there anything you want for your patient?"

Mrs. Lorne, once more by the sickbed, rubbed her niece's chest with camphorated oil. "Such a good woman, young Mrs. Cotton," she said in a rhythmic voice with the rubs, "such a good Christian ... and the soul of kindness to you, Lena girlie."

"Not very kind to me," said Lena, looking coldly at the ceiling.

"Now now now ... we must pick up heart a wee bittie.... I know you've been worrying over something and your mother always said how worry flew to your tubes...."

"Ff-ff-ff ..." laughed Lena faintly. She scarcely ever laughed except at herself. Her own indignities and humiliations were morbidly amusing to her.

"That's better," said Mrs. Lorne, snarling with pleased surprise. "If my girlie feels like it won't you tell auntie all about it ... two heads being better than one and whether or no, your dear mother and me never had a secret from each other when a girl...."

"Exactly like the old days at home," thought Lena. She had been quarrelsome and unfilial in her teens. It had been understood between mother and daughter that Lena had strong feelings but was undemonstrative. This fiction had been her lonely mother's rock. It had also kept open for Lena a path to unflinching kindness and comfort. Lena's confidences in her mother were like the reconstructions of prehistoric animals which scientists build up from a handful of bones and teeth. They were clever, logical and accurate, but were not informed by that subtle caricature of life and spirit that is the truth. Yet the gate to comfort was always open to Lena's fantastic appeals until her mother's death. And here was the gate opening again—a ghostly lifting of the latch....

Sardonically aware of her folly, Lena began Telling Auntie All About It.

"No, she's not kind to me. She hates me because she thinks her husband prefers the sense I talk to her own sweetly feminine prattle. She's a typical man's woman—the eternal feminine and all that ... they're always the jealous sort ... that kind of woman can't conceive of equality and friendship between man and woman.... They have nothing but their bodies to offer, poor things.... But it is a fact—"

"What is a fact, my girlie?"

"That he *does* care—it's extraordinary, for I only met him yesterday. There are such cases.... The man is starved of wisdom ... weary of being tied to a creature who's all paint and powder and conscious physical appeal.... She doesn't know what intellectual honesty is."

As she spoke she thought, "How extraordinary—that's almost true. However dishonestly I may speak, I have a core of quite disastrous honesty. Honesty's my secret vice—knowing myself's my vice. Daley

doesn't know herself—she never could mock at herself or punish herself or tear herself in pieces. Things are so easy for her—she's not alone—she's a universal—she fits in."

Mrs. Lorne's hand rather tremulously fidgeted with the hand of her niece. She wanted to be kind and understanding at all costs, even though she did not understand what there was to be understanding about.

"I wish to God I was dying," said Lena.

Mrs. Lorne recognised this as a thing she had thought herself after Bertie's death, so she realised that it was wrong and must be suppressed at once, though due no doubt to a touch of fever.

"Ssh-ssh, dearie," she hissed, getting up to look helplessly about for the thermometer. "Auntie's girlie mustn't let herself think like that—it's naughty. We must think of Mr. Cotton as a heavy cross to bear though in many respects an excellent man, pain being sent to test us and men suffering from a stronger animal nature. Ah here it is—in a black case too.... I thought it was a fountain pen."

She pressed the thermometer into Lena's mouth and stood for a few minutes waiting for Lena's reply. Then she added, "Oh how silly auntie is—you mustn't talk, girlie, while you're sucking the thermometer—oh no no no no." Suffering from an aberration curiously common even among competent amateur nurses, she forgot that it was not her speech but the patient's that was impeded by the thermometer. For three minutes she uttered only, "Mm-mm-mm" in various hopeful tones and waved her finger archly towards the clock. But all the time, while Lena was thinking how ridiculous she looked, Mrs. Lorne, reminded by the thermometer of her dead baby, was crying out in her heart for the dreadful hopeful hours of his illness to come back. Thermometers and hot-water bottles and saving movements of the hands were things that gave news. When thermometers were put away, hands might be still—for there was no more news to wait for. An excuse for waiting, a little excuse to hope and strain, a breathing baby still in her arms—simply the sound of breathing, even of difficult breathing—she was humble and would have asked for nothing surer than these. If she could only go on holding him, she had thought, he would be safe from death. She had strong hands; nothing really important had ever slipped out of them before. Surely a baby is not strong enough to defeat his mother in a battle. But Mrs. Lorne's baby had been strong enough. He had given her invincibility the lie. His life had slipped away between her strong hands. Eccentric low sounds that meant death had come from the baby's throat. It was as if the baby, who had never learnt men's words, spoke suddenly the speech of death. Edgar had said, "I can't bear it, Constance, I must go out for a while where I can't hear it." But Mrs. Lorne had stayed, and she had absolutely forbidden death to shut the baby's throat. She had forbidden silence to take the place of that roaring breath. She had guarded the threshold of his lips that life might not fly out. And when his life slipped past her, she had called him—Bertie, Bertie, Bertie—in a cracked inviting voice, to remind him that he was a prisoner under the lock and key of her strong hands.

She could always hear silence now. Through any sound, and especially through Lena's laboured reminding breathing, she could hear the silence of the baby with the unstirring earth over his mouth.

When she had finally drawn the thermometer out and looked at it closely, she said, "Just as I thought; we shall have our girlie perfectly well in a day or two if she will only hope for the best, breathe through her nose and leave it all to God." She said this in a brave sure voice in order to conceal the fact that

Lena's temperature was rather high. "Now my girly must turn over and go to dreamland—just to please Auntie...."

"I can't sleep," said Lena. "The mountains make such a noise."

Mrs. Lorne stood for a moment at the window and snarled reproachfully at the mountains. "Well, I'm sure," she said. "It is a very still morning, and you mustn't get ideas in your head about the mountains, dearie, because God made them and I like to think of His angels walking on them this minute just as in city streets and the meanest of His creatures." She could think of no better way to defeat the mountains than the drawing together of the curtains. She patted Lena's shoulder very tenderly and went away. She sat in the garden with tears in her eyes and asked God to lift the burdens of all sufferers.

Lena, left alone, gave a deep sigh and began to whisper to herself, "My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains my sense," which always made her feel emotional when she was ill. She had nothing beautiful to imagine, so she had to remember. But the thought of Daley, wounded, checked her whispering.

"Oh what a beautiful creature—what a beautiful creature," thought Lena, crying bitterly. "And now I've spoilt the kind look in her eyes."

CHAPTER VI

One who aspired to madness

Built a wall

To prison his singing, strange

And wanton joy.

But wings that wanton had,

And at her will

Afar she ranged,

And her cry was a dwindling cry.

So in the end he is sad

To know, being sane,

That no fine danger

Follows his menacing,

That he, throwing no new shadow

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Before the sun,
Must die without changing
Even a bird's song.

Mr. Diamond, who came to luncheon that day, was an extremely kind man. He noticed at once that Daley was looking sad and, unfortunately, not quite so pretty as usual. But he was above all things a gentleman, so he made no remark even remotely hinting that he had noticed anything at all. He was an expert in not noticing. He was a man of ffity-four, and nobody had ever heard him say anything impolite or really friendly.

"Oh that impossible Daley woman," said Daley, coming in with a soft bustle. "Always late, even when rows of the nicest people in the world are waiting for her, starving for their tiffins." The horrid echo of Lena's remarks was still in Daley's ears, but she could not help smiling eagerly at Mr. Diamond.

She had been looking forward to his coming. She had been counting on his comforting sanity. She had imagined his face—a short handsome face with keen reticent eyes under rough eyebrows. She had been hearing his voice in her mind, his curious careful way of pronouncing characteristically short and assured sentences. "Oh but that's de-läitt-ful—perf-fectly deläitt-full." He always opened his large mouth wide for vowels and snapped his consonants shut, dwelling on them a little.

She had imagined him arriving at her house in a bustle of pleasant ordinariness. He would walk through her garden with his jaunty gait. He would bend to chuck a snapdragon under the chin, humming with a cheerful tunelessness. Then he would see her and say, "This is the stuff to give the army." He always used slang clichés with a refined inaccuracy.

And here he was. It was all very nearly coming true.

"I'm sure, dear Mr. Diamond, lateness to you is the worst sin in the world. In fact I dare say you never heard of the other sins."

"Oh I know a frightful lot about sin," said Mr. Diamond in his short sprightly voice. "But lateness isn't a sin. Only brave and beautiful people dare to be late. I myself am always punctual to the tick. How is our invalid? Better. Better I am sure." While he talked he was busy doing polite things for Daley—shutting the door behind her, pushing up a chair for her, standing up till she had seated herself, putting on the arm of her chair a little wet tearose that he had brought from his garden. Clifford looked on in surprise.

Mrs. Lorne said, "Oh how very kind, how very good—I gave her a brisk rubbing with camphorated oil but of course bound to take its course and every one being so extremely kind."

"Isn't it extraordinary," began Daley, "how *clean* Mr. Diamond always looks ... like the baby who wouldn't be happy till he got it—after he got it..." But seeing at once that he was not very much pleased by this, though he laughed merrily, she went on, "And I've got a new record to play to you. Kreisler in a composition of his own. It's wunnerful. I'll play it to you after tiffin."

"I'd *love* that. I'd *love* that," said Mr. Diamond briskly. It was curious that, when Daley's Victrola ceased to play, Mr. Diamond was always found to have drifted unobtrusively out through the French window to the most distant corner of the verandah. But Daley believed everything that her friends said, so she believed that he loved her tame music and she believed him when he said that he could hear it best from a long way off.

"It makes me feel so unhappy to know that Lena is ill," said Clifford, as he sat down to luncheon. "You see, I'm hopelessly in love with Lena."

"Just as I am with Daley," said Mr. Diamond brightly. "It makes me feel so unhappy to see Daley looking so extremely well. It almost makes me begin to think she doesn't return my passion."

"No but I'm serious about Lena. Really, Mr. Diamond, you ought to know Lena better. I think her thin face is rather like a queer snake's face. And by Golly, such a marvellous mind! Living with Lena one wouldn't have to worry about not knowing enough ... she knows everything. She never says anything that hasn't a little twist of wisdom in it. Sometimes you only notice it afterwards. Oh, I *do* love her."

Mrs. Lorne, swelling with confused pride in her sister's child, thought, "Oh dear, oh dear, what a wicked way to talk. Well—I certainly am seeing life."

"This is delightful. Absolutely delightful," said Mr. Diamond. "I *love* Clifford in this mood. You are a priceless family, you know. Abb-solutely price-less."

"Oh no. We all have our price," quavered old Mrs. Cotton, and nobody knew whether she was being clever or only senile.

"Oh but you see, Clifford's serious," said Daley quietly and coldly.

"So am I," insisted Mr. Diamond. "Clifford hasn't got a monopoly of seriousness, has he? Daley, will you fly with me, and we'll leave Clifford to run off with his serpent into the garden of Eden?"

Mrs. Lorne coughed shyly to remind the Divine Author of the Book of Genesis that she was not a party to this coarse introduction of the Word into an immoral discussion, making a jest of right and wrong, though as a consul so hardworking and always willing to do his best for the Workers in Isolated Fields when the brigands got tiresome.

Daley laughed automatically.

After that Mr. Diamond talked for some time alone. He asked if they had seen the last *Punch*, and, finding that they had, reminded them of a few of the jokes that had seemed to him outstanding. He then talked rather well about a tour that he had once made in the lowlands of Scotland. He spoke with sincerity and sense of his regret that his duties in China prevented him from leading the life of travel and adventchah that he would have preferred. He claimed that he suffered from Wanderlust and a desire for the great uncrowded spaces of the earth, and, though he spoke in trivial and commonplace words, he was really not posing. He spoke of golf as a quack cure for Wanderlust, and added that actually it was nothing better than an anaesthetic. He talked pleasantly and with some ability for ten minutes, encouraged by the fact that Daley's eyes were fixed on his with an unusual intensity, and by the delusion that the ceaseless nodding of old Mrs. Cotton's head meant that the old lady was interested.

But in the middle of Mr. Diamond's rather amusing remarks on the feudal manners of headwaiters, Clifford said, "Have we sent champagne to Lena—our last bottle of champagne? That would make me awfully happy—to give her something that we couldn't spare."

And all at once Daley began to cry. She cried without a sound and shaded her eyes unobtrusively with her hand. She had never in all her five and twenty years discovered how to prevent herself from crying or laughing.

Mrs. Lorne, leaning over her stewed apricots, prayed for light. Yet it was extraordinary that light should be needed in a matter of sheer immorality like this. Lena and Mr. Cotton, it was evident, were harbouring wicked thoughts—and yet, at the same time, Lena was in distress and pain and must be loved and comforted. Wickedness seemed to be playing righteousness false. Lena seemed to need her aunt's love rather than her Maker's chastening hand.

Mr. Diamond began so hurriedly to talk again that he only just missed losing his head and telling a rather silly anecdote with which his nephew had once tried to entertain him. He rightly considered the anecdote to be but a spurious brass link in the social chain of silver speech and golden silence. He therefore ingeniously changed the inadvertent beginning of a funny story about a doctor and a female *malade imaginaire* into a series of abstract remarks about the evolution of doctors. How curious that medical students should be such an anti-social and—well, one might almost say *vulgar* group, and Harley Street doctors so eminently frockcoated. Mr. Diamond addressed himself carefully to old Mrs. Cotton. But all she said was, "Don't be such a fool, Daley. Do you think you're the fir-hirst that ever was married to a fairy with a cold heart?"

Mr. Diamond would have given up saving the situation then, had not Daley, in a very thin precarious voice that sounded as if it were balanced on a tightrope, remarked, "It's only because they learn to brush their hair when they grow up and go to Harley Street...." There was almost a sob at the end of the sentence.

"That's it," said Mr. Diamond. "That's it. That's it. You've hit it exactly. Hair in Harley Street is brushed to excess."

A servant gave Daley a note after luncheon. *Come and see me, please. I have offended you. Do let's understand each other. Lena.* Daley meditatively drew dogs on the note. Dog after dog obscured Lena's faint neat writing. "I'll never have anything to do with women again," thought Daley. "Dogs and men, left to themselves, would make a wunnerful world for me."

"Shall I take you to pay your respects to Josephine and her little new puppies, Mr. Diamond?"

"I'd love that. I'd love that."

"They're really too young to be handled, mum, even by you." Daley could hear Josephine's weak voice in her mind as she bent down at the door of the kennel. She said aloud, "I won't take them out. I guess I hold them wrong according to dog standards. Though the skin behind their necks seems to be provided by God for a handle. But Josephine herself always carried her puppies by their fat behinds. Bend double, Mr. Diamond, and you can see...."

The puppies enchanted her completely and she had forgotten her trouble. "That's Boniface—with spots. Pius and Clement you can just tell apart because Clement's tail curls a little. And Innocent's the girl. Like

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coffee ice-cream you are, my lovely one. All Josephine's babies always have these ingrowing noses when they're young. Josephine of course calls them *aquiline*. But anyway, life irons out their noses straight after a week or so."

She was surprised, on looking round at Mr. Diamond, to see that his face was not really rapturous, though he was smiling pleasantly. His merely polite response checked her delight, and she remembered that the world held pain as well as puppies.

"What did you think of what Clifford said at tiffin, Mr. Diamond?" she asked, trying to hold her voice that it might not tremble.

"I thought it perfectly delightful. Perfectly delightful," said Mr. Diamond at once. "You are a lucky lady to have a husband like Clifford.... You must feel so safe.... He simply doesn't know how to hide his lightest passing thought. You couldn't be deceived by Clifford any more than you could be run over by the old motor cars that I remember, that had to be preceded by a man with a red flag."

"But I'm not sure I wouldn't rather be deceived," said Daley in a breaking voice. "Knowing everything doesn't save me. Telling us about loving Lena doesn't make it any better that he should love her."

"Oh nonsense. Oh nonsense," said Mr. Diamond. "You're a little out of sorts today, Daley. I noticed it at once. At once. When one feels like that one is apt to make a fuss about nothing. I do it myself. Often. Often. Now tell me, dear, how d'you manage to make your snapdragons all grow one height? Mine shoot up all giants and dwarfs. They look so freakish."

"They're a freakish flower," said Daley, looking at him thoughtfully. "Oh Mr. Diamond—do you know, Clifford and I once argued the whole of one breakfast time about whether snapdragons had teeth...."

"And have they?" asked Mr. Diamond, pleased with this safe subject.

"I never looked. I kind of didn't want to...."

"Then I'll look now.... No they haven't—unless you could call these speckles teeth. They look more like the first symptoms of laryngitis to me...."

Just before Mr. Diamond went away, he took Daley's hand and held it for a moment. "And if there's anything I can do for you, Daley—anything in the world I can do—you must promise to let me know. I want you to consider me as a friend. Really. I want that very much. Promise now."

"And he can't say fairer than that," said Daley to herself briskly. "He can't say fairer than that."

When he had gone, Daley went reluctantly towards Lena's room. Mrs. Lorne, snarling violently, was waiting for her in the passage. "Just going back to see to the children's dinner," she said. "I don't know what to say about my niece's presence in your house.... By something Mr. Cotton said just now, I'm afraid she is not convenient, being ill just now here, but I don't know what to say...."

"No need to say anything," said Daley. "I'm feeling a bit peeved just now—that's all. Don't think of it again."

"Two bedrooms only at the Mission, otherwise the way would be clear, blood being thicker than water of course—but I don't know where I should put Lettie and Aggie. And gentlemen often say so much more than they mean ... I really don't know *what* to say."

"Dear Mrs. Lorne, how kind you always are," said Daley patting her arm. Mrs. Lorne hurried home to her children, thinking what a Strange Thing Life Was. She felt suddenly years older than her husband, who was at home innocently translating "Onward Christian Soldiers" into the local dialect. A Glimpse of Life in the Raw had been vouchsafed her, thought Mrs. Lorne, as she cut bread and butter.

In Lena's room Daley found Clifford kneeling by the bed, his arms sprawling over the prostrate form of the invalid. Lena lay in an awkward rigid attitude, as though she knew no spontaneous caresses and had forgotten to learn any by heart. Lena looked at Daley, but Clifford did not raise his head.

"Yes, you were right," said Daley. "We need to come to an understanding."

Usually nearly everything that Daley said had *dear* in it or *dearest* or a name like a caress. And when these things were missing, her speech sounded as though it had holes burned in its texture.

"We have come to an understanding, haven't we?" said Clifford. "Surely we all understand by now that I love Lena."

Lena flushed and moved her head on the pillow. "How brutal you are," she said to Clifford. "Daley, I suppose you wouldn't believe me if I told you that I never for a moment meant this to happen—that I'm sorry it happened...."

"No one could possibly believe that," said Clifford, straightening himself in surprise. He was so literal that a challenge to his credulity never failed to shock him. "Not even Daley could believe that. You told me last night that even death would never make you regret what we've done."

Daley felt no impulse to cry now. She was half stifled with anger and pain. "Stop talking to her. Stop talking to her. You must talk to me now—even if it's for the last time. What do you propose to do about this—discovery?"

"Why do anything?" said Clifford. "We're quite happy as we are. In fact this house is particularly convenient for such a *ménage*. We shouldn't have to change our lives at all—except at night...."

"Clifford—Clifford—what has happened to you? Have you forgotten me quite?" Memory seized Daley by the throat. She thought of her first sight of this convenient house—the curling eaves—the little shiny lions on the roof ridge—the pillars of the verandah painted with blue and red and yellow flowers and birds—the sinuous pale eucalyptus trees—the crowned starred poinsettia—the birds' songs in the bamboos, like flutes and bells—the anticipation of unpacking all the new linen and of soon having visitors singing in the bathrooms, rubbing their faces on the really wunnerful best guest face-towels.

"Just fancy being comfortable at home—in *China*!" she had said. It had seemed so odd that they should still be the same old Daley and Clifford—in a wild land like China. It seemed so odd that the silver inkstand—the Riddleys' wedding present—should have started from California—got out to be admired in Surrey—and finally shaken off its travelling kit in China—wild China.... Clifford had stumbled on the threshold as he and she entered the house. He often stumbled in houses; the roots of forests could not catch his feet as did steps and doormats and stair-rails. But that first time he stumbled because he had his arm so tightly and clumsily round Daley that it was almost like a three-legged race. "I'm so glad I've

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got a wife," he had said. "I'm so glad I've got a wife. People who come in from outside like me aren't generally so lucky as to find a wife and a home all readymade. I hope my life here will be very dull, like a real man's. I hope I'll see you coming in and out of this door a million times before I die." "Nothing ever happens a million times the same," Daley had said. "Not even the coming up and going down of the sun." But for a long time after that she was always happy coming in and out of that door, feeling herself watched by a lover—even when Clifford was not there waiting for her.

"Clifford—Clifford—can't you remember ...?" But his back was towards her now. He was watching Lena's face now.

"It would be a fantastic household," said Lena wearily. "But then everything's fantastic here."

"No," said Daley. "Not everything. I'm not fantastic. That's the worst of it. I'm from America. I'm not a bit fantastic...."

She went slowly to the door but she felt as if she were rushing madly, as if her heart were bursting after a violent physical effort. She stood alone on the verandah, clapping the palm of her hand senselessly against the wall.

"What shall I do now? What shall I do? What shall I do? I *must* be comforted."

The Ridleys were on the other side of the world.

There came into her mind the plain admiring face of Lion.

"Lion—what is Lion? Is that all the lover I have now? Lion—poor little Lion.... But I must find comfort somehow.... I must find some one who thinks well of me...."

As she ran through the garden, stumbling a little on her high heels, Josephine joined her. Josephine looked very thin and her whole body wagged like whalebone as she ran. It was as though she were triumphantly exaggerating her pliability after her long weeks of unwieldy rigidity.

Daley's heart was lighted up by the fact that Josephine had forsaken child-bed to run with her in search of comfort. "Yes, I know it's not awfully wise, mum," Daley murmured for Josephine, "but I just hated to see you galloping off into the world alone, and Innocent said she'd be a little mother to the boys while I was out."

The hills were folded round the valley like the petals of a great flower. The young gay bamboos seemed to shed, rather than to intercept, green sunlight. The history of the road, preserved up till yesterday in hard ruts, had been washed away by the sudden rain of last night. Only yesterday one had known by heart the hoof-prints of caravan ponies that by now cropped the flowery ditches half-way to Burma. Only yesterday thin twin grooves had recorded the old impression of Mrs. Lorne's baby's perambulator—that baby whose only mark on the earth now was a short neat grave in the mission church garden. Now the vandal rain had washed away intimate records that no one would ever trouble to remember.

A big beetle, unaccustomed to a seafaring life, wallowed across the red lumpy mud like a tramp steamer in the Channel. For a second Daley automatically imagined the beetle grumbling and cursing: "What's come to this bloody road to-day I can't imagine; it was perfectly respectable dust and dung yesterday

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and now it's like swimming in glue...." Daley jumped, as she ran, to make certain of not hurting or alarming the beetle, and was glad to notice that her dog did the same. "Live and let live," said Josephine. "And anyway, beetles taste like decayed walnuts...." Josephine whipped herself across the watery ditch and plunged into young barley as though into a lake. "It'll brush against her teats and the scent of it'll cool the puppies' noses," thought Daley. The effort of running was shaking up her thoughts. At every second she forgot what she had been thinking of before. She only knew vaguely that she must not think of Clifford just now. She must keep her mind skimming the very cream of feeling.

Presently she was on Lion's verandah. She looked desperately round for instant comfort. He was not there. An acute irritation seized her as she thought how easily he might have been there. She created his voice in her ears: "Daley—Daley—you've been crying...." She made for herself a vision of his pale ugly young face under the shadow of that dreadful old hat. On the wicker table on the verandah there was a book he had been reading—a rather manly novel by a Captain Something. Lion wanted to be manly—but not as Clifford wanted it. Lion wanted it conscientiously and in its proper place; he talked of a rounded balanced life—a sane mind in a sound body—he did exercises in the morning and read the works of English field-m Marshals as well as those of German philosophers.

"Oh it would be so *easy* to live with Lion," thought Daley. "So wunnerful not to have to be ashamed of being good...."

She thought: "It would have been so easy for God to have arranged that Lion should be here to comfort me. Why even *I* can nearly create him—can nearly make him exist on this verandah, close to me, comforting me—but God didn't think it worth while."

Then she realised that, even if she had found him, there would have been no hope of comfort. Lion's hand could never have pinned the happy sun again to the sky. She remembered the look of the gold and green bland ranks of the bamboos. She imagined now that they had assured her that they had been watching that path for years and years and had never yet seen comfort pass by. "Stonyhearted forests," thought Daley. "Clifford's mother said that Clifford was born of the stonyhearted fairies of the forest."

She stood in the road again, looking from side to side, clapping her hands quietly together. Young barley was on the right and the young plumed grove on her left. "Well—now—what shall I do? What shall I do? I can't go home. I haven't any home now...." Her jaws ached and she realised that she had been clicking and grinding her teeth rhythmically all this time. She could not get rid of the tiresome persuasion of rhythm.

Where the short cut across the rice-fields and barley-fields joined the main road, there was an open pavilion, an old shrine with a broken plaster god in it. The god's face was pursed and amused and very secret. Once he had pointed two fingers at the sky. The sky was the point of his secret joke, it seemed, but now his fingers were broken. Daley sat down on a squared stone at the foot of the altar, beside a sheaf of joss-sticks that stitched the air with thin embroideries of smoke. Her mind was misty. She could not touch the place where her sorrow was. She felt her breast instinctively and then snatched her hand away, remembering Clifford's hands there.

She sat listening intently to the singing of the birds. Something, it was evident, must happen now. It was the gods' turn. Nothing less than comfort should lure Daley from her throne at a god's feet. Final

comfort or final catastrophe must declare itself as a motive to that senseless pattern of birds' songs and young barley—of bamboo shade and the smell of joss-smoke.

There was no sound of coming comfort on the air. Even Josephine had gone home to feed her puppies. "A mother's first duty, you know, mum," Daley had drearily murmured for her. There was the noise of distant Chinese music, growing and fading. But that music had no voice for the heart. Very well then, Daley's retort to the silence was simple; she would stay there with her fingers stroking her forsaken breast till she died.

She had never had time before to know that she was alive. Now she had a long time in which to wish that she were dead.

CHAPTER VII

This is the feast,
The guests assemble,
These are the goblets—these
Are the fluted stems
Of the goblets, even these trees
That hold the dark sky trembling.

And must poor man,
Who has so little daring,
With such companions
Such a banquet share—
With dead lovers—with phantoms—
With cold fairies—?—?

When Daley had gone, Clifford left Lena's bedside and went to look out of the window. His interest in the actions of people, and his inability to imagine their proceedings without the evidence of his eyes, pulled him often out of his path to watch them for as long as possible. Once they were gone they were gone, for him; his mind had no wings to follow them; so his eyes and ears had to do what they could.

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He saw the polished bright hair of Daley move quickly along the top of the sweet-pea hedge with a jumping movement. The gap between the sweet-peas and the gate gave him a photographic glimpse of her, hurrying, bent forward in her grass-green smock like a rich flower in a wind. Josephine followed her in a black flash. After that, as far as Clifford was concerned, his wife slipped off the world. But he did not at once turn back into the bedroom. His eyes were fixed upon the high upper leaves of the grove. Like the waves in a swell after a storm, the tips of the trees moved heavily and deliberately in a lazy wind. The wind, it seemed, was tethered high to the clouds, for the flowers low down in the garden were looking one at another quietly, having heard no rumour of a wind. The only things that Clifford really understood were the soil, the grass, the weeds and the trees. He had no poetic knowledge and no words of understanding—only a flat prosaic intimacy. The things that were rooted in the soil were his only kindred; he was as senseless as an animal in his familiarity with them. He was afraid of anything natural that he could not account for—of thunder—of a great wind—of the darkness of night. He was in constant fear of magic experience. The danger humiliated him. If he had known how, he would have slain this lurking dragon of magic; such a victory would have brought him into line with stockbrokers, golfers, housemaids, bishops ... all of whom, he knew very well, possessed something that he himself lacked—something that gave them their mild confidence and enabled them to read their *Daily Mirror* without anguish or wonder.

"Oh Lena, tell me what it is that I've been looking for, for the last seven years."

"I thought you said you never forgot anything."

"I don't. But I can't remember what I never knew."

"Perhaps you're looking for a soul," said Lena dully. "Any one can see you haven't a soul—only a body."

"What do you mean? Are you blaming me? Don't you love me?" He had come away from the window now and was leaning urgently towards her.

"Love's nothing to do with it. Since I haven't a body myself, I only need a body to love...."

"What have you then, if you haven't a body? Are you soul through and through?"

"Oh my God, no. I'm nothing through and through. I'm nothing at all."

"That can't be so," said Clifford, rubbing his nose. "I couldn't love nothing at all."

"You might love the difference between yourself and me—but not for long."

"I couldn't lie by night side by side with just a difference, could I, Lena?"

"Many people do."

"I don't understand you. But you make me see what I love in you now. I love you because I don't understand what you say—and yet I feel if I listen I shall understand, some day. You don't say things that I might just as well have said myself, as Daley always does."

"Oh take your hand from my breast, Clifford. I can hardly breathe. Your hands are so heavy—and so are my bones."

Clifford moved away, surprised but not offended. He went to the window again. He was vaguely proud of being spoken to fretfully by the inexplicable yet mysteriously accessible Lena. It was a kind of preliminary initiation into wisdom. Every moment spent with her would be informing, he thought. What had Daley ever said that gave a man that corrected wise feeling? Clifford could hear in his head a sort of soft clamour of Daley's silly talk; he could hear her voice—her clear golden throaty speech like a little far bugle.... "Oh Clifford *darling*—do look at the expression of that puppy's tail.... Oh Clifford—don't you sometimes wonder if people're alive when we're not there? ... Dearest, I dreamt you were so sweet to me ... we were riding on an elephant across Siberia ..." Daley was easy and kind. She would never have dismissed his hand from her breast. One could live for years with Daley and never really be obliged to listen to anything she said.

Lena watched him as he stood by the window. The sunlight, reflected by the bleached stone terrace and the big bronze goldfish tank outside, made a sort of blur of light on his face. His face, with this low upward light upon it, looked theatrical and, to her, wonderful. She thought of the Fulham poet on whom she had wasted years of painful emotion. She saw him as a small rather dirty man with a wan wild triangular face under studiously unkempt hair. He carried hysteria almost too far; his hands, too, erred on the side of beauty. The sight of Clifford made foolish the thought of that highly articulate young man. For Clifford was very tall; his shoulders were broad and his body, though not fat, was heavy. His thick layer of straight hair was brushed and damped on either side of a onesided parting, in careful imitation of the hair of a bank manager in Shanghai whom Clifford considered to be the finest possible flower of ideal common-placeness. Everything about Clifford's clothes suggested the Sunday clothes of a respectable working man, but everything was inspired by some unsuspected example. It was his desire, as Lena knew, to look like the most ordinary man in the world; his illusion was that he was cursed with the body of a fairy, as well as with a fairy's heart.

Lena looked at him and laughed—"Ff-ff-ff—" to herself at the glorious Clifford's childishness. She was most intensely grown-up herself.

Her side was still giving her pain. Pain clipped off the end of each careless breath. But she was almost a match for the pain. She was skilled in cautious breathing by now. She was terribly tired, and now and then a kind of haze of half-sleep came over her. Little tender illusions played round her humming consciousness; she thought that there was a robin in her room, that she had a telegram in her hand announcing that her dead mother was on her way to visit her and take care of her, that her pillow was a white cloud smelling of violets....

The stillness was compounded of the ticking of the clock and the silly sprightly doggerel of the sparrows outside. This insistent small clamour, like farthings clinking on a plate, accumulated upon her sleepy hearing, and every few minutes awoke her. But once a new noise pushed aside a little dream, and she looked around and saw Clifford stepping out of the low window. He had thrown his head back as though he had seen an aeroplane or an angel. One robust hand gripped the window-frame. In a minute he was gone. Lena thought perhaps she had offended him by her dismissal of his heavy hand. But she was not gentle enough to feel troubled by this thought. She often offended people and did not mind doing so. So many people made mistakes that ought not to be allowed to pass, she thought.

Lena slept for a time, but now, while she slept, she was conscious of the dry cracked feeling of her lips, and of the burning dint in the pillow, in which her head, she thought, was laid like a phoenix's egg. She

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could no longer dream pleasantly; senseless puppets seemed to be jerked clumsily across the stage of her dreaming consciousness. The background of all that she saw seemed shattered. The words in her mind would form no pattern. "Dunville ... shards ... minstrel ... poker ... phosphates...." It seemed vitally necessary that she should recall some phrase she had forgotten.

And presently a great ugly jangling came into her ears. It grew quickly from a little seed of sound and soon blotted out the sunny chinking silence. In a moment it filled the whole world and Lena awoke with a shout. As she jolted herself awake the sound ceased. It was incredible that she should have dreamt such a monstrous and boundless clamour. The various discordant notes of it were still remembered by her ears. Yet here, in the common world, there was only silence—a silence from which, she realised, the singing of the birds had been strangely withdrawn.

Old Mrs. Cotton pushed the door noisily open with one of her sticks and hobbled into the room.

"Did you hear the music?" she asked urgently in her deep cracked voice.

Lena did not answer. She never helped talk to continue. Daley would have said, "Why I *thought* I heard *something*.... I was just *wondering*.... What *was* it?" Perhaps old Mrs. Cotton thought of this. She looked at Lena as though interested to meet a rival expert in disagreeable manners. Her monopoly of insolence was broken. She was obliged to say, "There was music.... I heard it before, seven years ago...."

"I was trying to sleep," said Lena fretfully. "I'm feeling pretty bad...."

Old Mrs. Cotton sat down by the bed. She could not resist the impulse to do this, even though, by giving way, she risked making an apparent gesture of friendliness. She was excited. She hissed in and out through her teeth and chafed the knobs of her sticks with her ugly old hands. She had a little tinsel flower pinned in her sand-grey hair, but it might just as well have been a straw for all the graciousness it gave her nodding head. The flower seemed to wince weakly with every nod.

Lena looked at the old woman without very much contempt. She felt more at home with eccentric incalculable people than she did with the courteous and gentle. This old woman, for instance, might have been met without surprise coming out of a slovenly studio in London to scold the milk boy. She looked like some one with thirty spicy novels to her name, or like some one who had been loved by one of the Mid-Victorian poets in the sixties.

One could imagine young reporters, trying not to smile, collecting her reminiscences. She looked so extraordinary that only utter provincials would turn to look at her.

"Eh ... yes ... seven years ago-ho ... before we left the beechwoods," said the old woman harshly. "That music robbed our American Home of its Daddy.... And when we got there—the cupboard was bare—except for the American skeleton in it...."

"If you mean Daley, she isn't too obviously American," said Lena. "She speaks with the whole of her voice...."

"She's lost her accent, but she's kept her soul ... her American imitation soul.... My son is married to a five-foot shelf...."

"Mrs. Cotton—you're insular."

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"If more of us were insular," said Mrs. Cotton, turning upon Lena with a savage gesture that was of necessity tamed by her dragging affliction. "If more of us were insular, there wouldn't be so—much—*danger*." She smacked the head of one cane with a cupped palm, and sniffed and clicked her teeth as though she had said something very telling.

"Danger of what?"

"Of the growth of a—substitute—American world...."

"Oh well ..." grumbled Lena. "Time's up for the old world anyway. It's America's turn now. And the deterioration of civilisation hasn't been all America's fault. We've all had a hand in making the world secondrate."

"No. No. No-ho. We all fell away from high standards, but America's teaching us how to live up to low ones. There never was a secondrate thing where a firstrate thing ought to be till America put it there. Curse America. Curse America. Curse America," she shouted, shuddering violently. "People who are young now are damned ... they can never again hope to hear any voice but America's...."

"Well—why do we listen?" asked Lena. "Nobody need ever listen to anything they don't want to hear."

"It's such a—loud—voice ..." quavered old Mrs. Cotton. "The voices of deaf and dumb imbeciles, when they are taught to speak, are much louder than the voices—of—the—wise. It's a mechanical voice ... speaking cheap and easy substitutes for truth ... so irresistible ... in a world in which truth has been so hard.... Oh the corrupted young ... it's not at all dreadful, Lena, to be old—now...."

Lena did not speak. The words *old* and *young* meant very little to her. She was held in a kind of bleak immortality.

"To be old," said old Mrs. Cotton, "doesn't mean fear of death now ... it means hope—of—escape...."

She hummed like a wasp for a moment before she spoke again. Tears were rolling down the grooves of her cheeks.

"It was such a shy difficult world.... It was such a wonderful world.... Anything might happen in that world—it was so gloriously unfair. Fools were not heard. Anyone who knew that world should make haste to die before the last drooping beautiful difficulties of that world fade...."

"The difficulties weren't beautiful at all," said Lena fretfully. "They included slavery and bad sanitation and rotten boroughs and insolent charity and corrupt government.... They didn't include birth control or trade unions or garden cities or Fresh Air Funds or chloroform or—"

"Oh yes—you have plenty of ki-hindness now.... Oh yes, America's treacled the world over with ki-hindness. Daley's kind—democracy's always dreadfully kind. Kindness is a symptom of vulgarity. Can't you feel the breath of death in your Fresh Air Funds ... in your classes in Egyptology for the children of the half-witted? ... Would you rather have all that American ki-hindness than the glory of the unequal world—than wit—than learning—than loneliness—than strangeness—than the music of the fairies? ..."

"You needn't go on telling me that democracy means government of the wise by fools," said Lena. "But damn it all—we were in a minority—the wise and the odd were in a minority. Does a world spoilt for us matter so awfully?"

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"What else matters? What else matters?" cried the old woman in a loud breaking voice. "It was the only world we had—and it stinks now like a ro—hotten fruit—stinks with American ki-hindness.... Blighted—blighted—blighted with imitations—with substitute intelligence—substitute ethics—substitute art.... The true-born bodies of the young are nourished on substitute foods ... their habits and desires are taught them by American magazine advertisements ... a substitute soul, readymade out of the pages of the Atlantic Mo-honthly, is all the young may pray for.... And even that they send to sleep with radio bedtime stories...."

"But what did you send your soul to sleep with when you were young?"

"You ask me that—*you*, who have a fairy for lover?"

Lena looked at the old witch's wild parched face, her bent subsiding figure, the lifeless strands of hair that grew on her yellow nape. The spoilt tawdry body of the old woman was a completely baffling fortress. Nothing within the fortress could be imagined. Nothing escaped from the fortress but an old quavering voice, beating like a lame bird out of a darkness beyond understanding. Lena sighed bitterly.

"Oh, your fairies ... your music...."

"There's so little—music—now ..." whispered old Mrs. Cotton. "Only the sound of wheels going round.... Only very rarely now—magic—puts—a—finger—in the—wheel ... To-day the music passed.... Perhaps—never—again...."

Lena felt crushed with weariness. She closed her eyes. The echo of music seemed to remain upon the deep jerking voice of the old woman, as the scent of lavender clings to old silks and velvets. Lena wandered into a comfortless humming sleep. And all through her throbbing dreams the old voice seemed to sound, speaking of music—of music that was played on the tuned strings of the trees—of music like the breath of God that was only breathed to give life or to steal away men's souls—of the music of the stonyhearted fairies.... It seemed to Lena that she was being forced to an unwilling understanding—forced into fellowship with something from which her sour cleverness had always defended her. She felt herself covering under a rushing advancing wave—an enormous breaking wave of music—the fierce shadowed edge of a wave of forest plumed with the tall lances of the fairies....

She heard a man's voice outside shouting, "Oh—look—look!" And she heard her own voice screaming, "Never—never—never—"

She opened her eyes. She was alone. She had slept a long time. The silken light of late afternoon was hung upon the walls.

"Never—never—never ..." she found herself crying as she covered her streaming eyes. "Never again music ... never again to lie in the arms of a fairy...."

CHAPTER VIII

Words—though in words we may speak
The wisdom of God—yet a bird's
Tongue would disdain them. Sing, cynic
Lark, and our God seems young.

Old are the flowers in the grass,
Yes, though their petals be golden,
Hoary they are, and possess
All time for a story.

Bowed are men's bodies with hidden
Age—though the young are so proud—Youth
cannot lie to men's bodies,
For they know all truth.

Forgive then, old world, my new heart,
Born in an old body, to live
Burning with wonder—and at last
To die without learning.

Milady and Edna had quarrelled on their return from Lena's bedside. Constant travel and frequent weariness had more or less kept the peace between them till now. But a long noon spent together in an adapted hospital ward among Chinese foothills had satisfied them that their suspicions as to each other's inferior natures were well-founded.

Edna perhaps need not have washed her hair. But surely she could hardly know that the sight of her heavy bush of dull brown hair was annoying to her companion. Milady, in *déshabillé*, had to wear a lace boudoir cap trimmed with pink silk rosebuds to conceal the fact that her masculine hair-cut had brought with it the masculine curse of "thinness on the top." By wily brushing she concealed this affliction during the daytime. Lena said once that she had to do this "because of the angels."

"My—you'll have a job getting a comb through that tangle," said Milady, darning a pink silk vest.

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"Nothing to matter," said Edna placidly.

"I've always wished I had coarse hair like you," said Milady. "Mine's like silk. I've always had a job with it. Plenty of it but as fine as silk...."

Edna sniffed, simply because the soap in her eyes made her nose run a little, but Milady attached meaning to the sniff.

"Not but what people don't generally admire fine hair," said Milady sharply. "That boy on the ship said the great desire of his life was to stroke my hair. 'Must feel like silk,' he said. But I said, 'That's all very well, laddie, you can't make anything of a show with fine hair. Give me coarse hair like Edna's,' I said."

"You and your boys ..." said Edna.

"Yes—me and my boys ..." said Milady, biting a thread savagely. "Where would you be without me and my boys, I should like to know? You don't imagine it's you that brings the boys to our show—do you—you, mooing like a lovesick cow? Or Lena, playing highbrow stuff with no more figure than a match?"

"Oh get on with you, Milady. What's the matter with you?"

"Matter? What's the matter with *you*? Perhaps *you'd* like to take a turn at running this damn menagerie and see what *you* make of it. Perhaps you think it was *your* goo-goo eyes got us that feed at Diamond's last night and the fizz and all...."

"Oh *you* got it all right, trust *you*. *You* do all the asking, my dear.... You'd ask for the shirt off a man's back...."

"Yes, I got it, but you was quite ready to eat an' drink it when got, I noticed, miss."

"Well, I didn't eat an' drink so much of it as you did, anyway."

"Oh go on, do. Say I was tight. Don't mind me...."

Edna stood up, twisting her wet hair into a rough knot with slow irritated gestures. She did not like quarrelling. Her mind was not alert enough to allow her to quarrel joyfully. She liked to sit silent with nothing to do, and to feel drowned in placidity. Hers was an entirely stationary mind; she did not so much think as make small statements to herself. Her only conscious thoughts were memories—neither happy memories nor unhappy ones. She simply groped for details in her dull past life and, though she had always been too unobservant to collect enough details to satiate her rapacious memory, the effort of groping was not at all tiresome to her. "What *was* the name of the Elliott's servant, now?" she would think. "Something beginning with M.... It wasn't Lily, was it? Their number was seven—seven Kenilworth Villas ... it was the people next door that had the tennis court ... *my*, how he used to perspire, much worse than Walter, though he must have weighed two stone less.... What *is* the name of that stuff Maudie said to put under your arms? ... A Latin name ... Kum-Kloca-Kream—K-K-K—yes that was it ... poor old Maudie, she did used to say comic things ... and now she's got five kiddies.... What *was* that riddle of hers about Two-lips Four-lips? ... *My*, she was a mad girl ... pity she married Ted Wilson—he'll never get on in the Insurance...."

Edna was very tolerant. Of course Milady was "fast," and Lena said "awful atheistical things." Edna did not hold with impropriety or with atheism—but neither was any affair of hers. Everything outside the

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quiet tower of her placidity was no affair of hers. Without being influenced by the surroundings of her life at all, she had become entirely accustomed to them. Milady's frail loves and Lena's irascible blasphemies did not really disturb Edna at all. Not holding with them kept her safe from them.

As she stood before the mirror pushing her hair into a specious neatness under her hat, the doctor appeared at the French window. Milady gave a little coy scream but Edna was mildly shocked. "Well, he might knock or cough or something. One of these days he'll be catching us in our skins," she thought.

"Excuse the liberty," said the doctor brightly to Milady. The doctor caught romance coming and going; he admired Daley because he thought her so good and Milady because he thought her so naughty.

"This is Liberty Hall, laddie," said Milady, sitting deftly on the dirty vest she had been darning. "As who should know better than yourself?"

"Oh girls, I'm so blue," cried the doctor, rubbing his hands together in brilliant expectation. "I've been listening to Chinese insides all the morning, and now I want some one to hold my hand and love me...."

He was a most innocent creature. Any woman could please him by simply pretending that he seemed to her worth pleasing. Milady flattered him much more than she knew by producing and using her vanity bag.

"Well, you don't need a stethoscope to listen to love with," said Milady with her wild laugh. "Why, Edna darling—don't go away and leave poor little me all alone with this dangerous man...."

"Two's company," replied Edna mildly. "Bye-bye all. See you later."

She wanted to go as far as the Mission and see Mr. and Mrs. Lorne, who had struck her as being reely nice people.

Mr. Lorne was bent double over a box of pamphlets on the Mission verandah. He looked at Edna coldly without straightening himself, getting an almost upside-down view of her.

"Hope you don't object to me smelling your roses," said Edna. "I'm partial to roses. They remind me of my home in Brixton."

Mr. Lorne made no reply. He stacked the pamphlets in little piles of equal size. They were *Finger-posts in Foreign Fields, Compiled by Edgar Lorne and printed by Clifford Cotton*.

"You're busy," said Edna, a little disappointed. "Don't let me disturb you."

"No I won't," said Mr. Lorne. "I am busy." He was a small man of about forty-five. He looked like a large man in miniature. Bones seemed to claim undue attention in his body; his high shiny ungracious forehead looked like naked bone; the ridges of his cheeks were marked with red patches; his shoulders were broad and angular beneath his hot brown suit, and his knuckles looked like round nuts inside the taut skin.

Edna liked his face. She did not want to leave him. She wanted to talk to him, to ask him where he lived when he was in England, what was his nearest station, whether the cinema palace in his neighbourhood had a piano or a reel orchestra, if his sister rode a bike....

"D'you mind if I sit down here and watch you while you work? I won't say a word. This garden is so lovely and quiet."

Only as she sat down did she realise that Clifford was sprawling on the verandah in the shadow of a high trellis of roses, opening and shutting one of the little pamphlets.

"This garden is God's garden," said Mr. Lorne, standing upright and opening his pale eyes very widely. "It is kept quiet so that God's voice may be heard."

"The result is," said Clifford, "that you can't hear anything else. Human voices are so little compared with God's. They are drowned."

"I must say, you're neither of you shy about talking about—religion and all that," said Edna. "Most people feel silly, somehow—but of course it's silly to feel that way."

"I have no other talk," said Mr. Lorne.

"Oh don't apologise—I'm not crabbing you," said Edna hastily. "I'm all for people doing what they please and thinking what they please and saying what they please."

"I'm not," said Mr. Lorne. "I'm all for people doing and thinking and saying what pleases God."

"Oh that's shirking difficulties," said Clifford. "It's being human that's difficult. You get stolen away from your valuable difficult self by pleasing God."

"Yes. Why not?"

"Why not? Oh you make me shudder. You make me shudder with your 'Why not?' Isn't it a terrible enough ordeal to find a self—and must one lose it at last when found?"

"Mr. Lorne's quite right," said Edna. "It's wicked to be selfish. Selfishness never did any one any good." But she was not paying much attention to the talk. She was absorbing the details of Clifford's appearance. He looked like a country squire, she thought, remembering British country squires in Californian moving pictures. She looked at his clumsy tweed suit—"Harris tweed costs a awful lot these days,"—at his navy blue dotted tie—at his thick straight hair—at his spectacles—"A reel gentleman ought to wear gold rims or tortoiseshells or invisibles—not those tin things.... Why, even Mr. Marshall, the grocer at the corner of the High Street, wore gold rims to his nose-pinchers.... His stockings'll be knitted by his wife—or perhaps his mother; that's the khaki wool we used to knit for the boys in the Great War; you can buy it cheap now, left-over lots.... My, his shoes are scratched—he must be forever walking among brambles...."

"Of course other people's selves are beyond me," said Clifford. "My self is all I have to go on—and I know hardly anything about that. But having a self at all is very precious to me—not every changeling gets such a chance.... Being real and human is such fun.... For instance, it's wonderful to me to think I knew how to print this book—to think I was real enough to put all these senseless little black letters together with my hands and with my eyes and with my unknown heart—just like a real man. How did my heart know all that? Have I stopped being a poor changeling at last? Mayn't I value this clever self of mine that has come safely through a dangerous world? Mayn't I sit safe in my body now, and not go out and look for a soul? Being me is like coming out of a forest on to a trodden path. To look for a soul I

should have to leave the path again and go on into the forest on the other side. It's so dangerous being outside yourself for a second. It's putting yourself into the power of magic again. Magic is what I've fled from. And you know, Mr. Lorne, real men don't have souls. They have bodies, and they know about stocks and shares and how to offer another fellow a gin-and-bitters and how to tie a bow tie—but they haven't got souls. It's *real men* I want to be like—not dangerous evangelists of magic like yourself...."

"You're more heathen," said Mr. Lorne sombrely, "than all the four hundred million Chinese put together."

"Oh I'm glad you think that," cried Clifford. "I'm glad I strike you as being heathen. Looking for wisdom has made a heathen out of me—and that's a step towards reality. I have not been corrupted after all, then, by having you for a neighbour. Some day I shall be wise. But you will never be wise—you are locked away in your magic soul—locked away from human wisdom. Even your face is big and flat, like the locked door of a safe."

"Oh come now—that's rude," said Edna. "I think Mr. Lorne has got a very nice face. Don't you pay any attention to what he says, Mr. Lorne."

Clifford lost interest suddenly. He had just noticed Edna's flat didactic voice for the first time. He slammed the little book with finality, as though it were a door, and stepped off the verandah into the fine plaited shadows of the bamboos.

He walked away to the echo of his own voice. He was proud of talking as a man with a man. He thought that that was how stockbrokers talked in the Shanghai Club. "No fairy could talk like that," he thought. But the talk was over. There was silence in the grove. He stood still and realised nervously the silence of himself. "Am I still here—in my body?" he asked aloud. He listened to the ticking of the watch on his wrist. He looked behind him. Framed in a little starry frame of bamboo leaves, he could see Mr. Lorne's distant flat grave face turned towards him. "He's putting a spell on me. He can see me. He's wishing a soul into me. His God is reaching out for me...." He was full of strange fear, and he could hear quite clearly Mr. Lorne's voice saying to Edna, "He who would save his soul must lose it." ... "That means losing yourself," whispered Clifford. "I am losing my dear self...." He felt himself melting away in the spreading scent of the roses. He could hear the air all singing with comfortable busy voices. In front of him, in a little clearing, a bee spurned the head of a columbine and set the flower swinging. The columbine swayed and swayed, and above it all the leaves of the bamboos began swinging and swaying as though the springing bee had released a million pendulums. Clifford's eyes followed the swinging. The inexorable rhythm of the world suddenly caught him and made him swing and sway on his feet. He could hear the bees' music. His thoughts sank in greenness and in humming. "I knew it would come," he said, but he could not hear his own voice. He was deaf and yet he could hear all the songs of the world. He was blind and yet saw with a million eyes all the splinters of bright sky between the bamboo leaves. He was dumb and yet had a million voices—all the voices of the crackling growing grasses. He, who had never taught his great body to dance, was one with a horde of dancers; all his thoughts danced separately, bowing to the blades of the grasses, hand in hand with the columbines. All his thoughts were bees, humming and dancing, all his thoughts were green stars and crackling air. He was a cloud in the sky, a leaf in the grove; he was a note of music. For a second all the wind was music and all the grasses bowed under the advancing feet of an army of the changeling's kinsmen.

"Listen," said Mr. Lorne to Edna in the Mission garden.

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"What to?" asked Edna.

Mr. Lorne started and looked at her a little wildly. "There was a strange hush then," he said in his dull voice. "It was almost as if God spoke."

Edna sighed—not because she felt puzzled, but simply because of the feeling of rest in the garden. She tried to find an opening for more interesting talk. "How many brothers and sisters have you got, Mr. Lorne?" she began, when she felt that a sufficient pause had followed the name of God.

Mr. Lorne only answered with an ambiguous murmur. His mind was like a bird flying over a shoreless sea. He was sustained forever between cloud and cloud; he had no knowledge of weariness or of rest or of the dull soil. He was unknown to himself; he was a lost explorer in the airy continent of God. Everything that he did was done in ecstasy, in effort and in humility. He had nothing to compare himself with except God, no mirror but the high lonely sky.

"Well, I must be moving along," said Edna at last. "I wish I didn't have to. I'm bound to say you're the only person that ever made me want to be religious. Of course I'm Church of England and all that. St. Mary's, we used to go to ... Reverend Stevens. But you're somethink different. I wish every one was more like you. But a person's got to earn her bread, hasn't she?"

"That depends," said Mr. Lorne.

"What d'you mean—*that defends*? One's got to live...."

"That depends," said Mr. Lorne.

"Now that's carrying things a bit too far. It doesn't depend at all," said Edna, a little affronted. "If you mean to cast aspersions, I can tell you, I've always kept straight."

"Only God can make paths straight," said Mr. Lorne. "If you haven't found God, you don't know what straightness is."

"I tell you——" began Edna, but Mr. Lorne suddenly went into the house.

Edna walked along the track under the young bamboos. A shimmer of thin green trunks was on her right and on her left. There was a sound of music from behind the screened turn of the path. A coolie with a banner came round the corner. He was dressed in torn and humble blue cotton and had a hungry and senseless face. He carried the dirty triangular banner awry in the crook of his arm. Behind him came another coolie, tapping a gong desultorily, and after him three more men playing a recurring succession of six notes on thin pipes. There were more banners, carried before a village palanquin that was borne by four men. Within the palanquin was the bridegroom, a boy of perhaps fifteen years old. His invisible bride was carried behind him, imprisoned in a closed scarlet chair, and her chair was made foolish and glorious with tassels, paper roses, festoons, spangles and crudely painted panels.

"Well I never ... how these Chinks do carry on!"

A buffalo, ridden by a very little boy, plodded slowly in the wake of the procession. The buffalo's great ugly barrel of a body was all jewelled with the grains of sunlight that sifted through the woven fine leaves. Edna did not trust buffaloes, but she trusted to the wisdom and authority of the little boy. The buffalo lifted up and put down its great splay hoofs very deliberately. It had large oily eyes and a large

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oily nose. The tuft of hair on its brow was neatly parted by Providence; its enormous horns were measured off in ridges, as were the bamboo stems. The horns were wider than the path and Edna saw that, however skilful a steersman the little boy might be, there would be no room for herself and the buffalo on the path. She could hardly expect a creature with a six-foot yoke of solid horn across its head to turn aside into the thick springing grove. So Edna herself turned aside. The damp tangled grass whipped her ankles through her thin silk stockings. She stroked the glazed green skin of the straight tree-stems with her hands, as though coaxing them to make way for her.

A green aisle in the grove seemed to open before her, beckoning her attention to something. At the end of a fortuitous perspective she saw something. She combed the grass with her feet as she pressed forward to examine something unexpected.

Here was, it seemed, the scene of a battle. A khaki sock, bent double over a high twig, a tweed coat, looking broken-backed across a stump, a white shirt all spotted with the vague marks of small feet, crumpled aertex underclothes stained with grass, a dotted tie and a pair of steelrimmed spectacles mixed up with a group of columbines.

"Well I never!" said Edna aloud.

She stared for a moment and then thought, "Well ... if Mr. Cotton hasn't gone in bathing somewhere." She looked about guiltily, ready to avert chaste eyes at a second's notice. The grove gleamed on all sides, straight green cords strung between flat green grass and a tufted green ceiling. She could see no dell that might conceal a pool of water and a naked printer. The grove had almost the transparency of green rain—it could surely hide nothing more substantial than a fairy. A hole in the ground, which in England would have been a rabbit hole, allowed one leg of a limp pair of tweed trousers to be seen.

"Well I never!" said Edna again. In some confusion she decided that perhaps the mystery was best not enquired into by a lady. Yet she could not help feeling intensely curious. She turned her face towards the hospital and Milady. But as she walked her mind was teased by surmises. "Whatever can it mean?" she asked herself again and again. Her face wore a more deeply thoughtful look than it had worn when she had expressed a craving for religion. "He couldn't have gone in bathing—there wasn't any water.... Whyever should he take off every stitch and go right away? Even his aertexes were there ... and he wasn't hiding—there wasn't anything big enough to hide behind.... Some funny doings at the crossroads tonight, as the saying goes.... It's downright vulgar of me to bother ... no affair of mine ... live and let live ... but whyever ..." etc. etc.

At the edge of the grove Chang Chu-lien was trying to learn to ride a bicycle. His robe was hitched precariously up to his waist, showing striped blue and white cotton trousers which trembled with endeavour and discouragement. His black skull cap was pushed across his shaven skull towards one ear. When he saw Edna, he fell off rather neatly on one leg and, after disentangling the other from the bicycle, bowed to her.

"So you've got cycles in China!" said Edna. "Just fancy! Getting quite up to date, aren't you ..."

Chang Chu-lien bowed in a gratified way. "I have not yet learnt very thoroughly to ride bicycle. I fall upon road frequently but not so frequently as formerly."

"If you don't succeed at first," said Edna, "Try, try, try again."

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Chang Chu-lien joined in the Try, try, try again. It was one of the texts he had committed to memory at mission school. He was always glad when he could put his education to a social use. "Are you bicycle expert?" he asked happily.

"Well, I've done a goodish bit of cycling," answered Edna, but she did not tell him about her ride from Croydon to Rochester, because she was thinking of her discovery in the grove. "Mr. Julian, I've found such a funny thing..."

Chang Chu-lien cautiously prepared himself to laugh. One never knew what foreigners would call funny. But one could always watch their faces and be ready.

"Well now ... I hardly like to tell you ... I've found a heap of things.... Do you know where Mr. Cotton is?"

"I think he has gone dancing," said Chang Chu-lien. "A short time ago I heard him leaping here and there amidst the trees with loud songs."

"Leaping? Dancing?" echoed Edna in a loud desperate voice.

"Perhaps I mistake," added Chang Chulien. "I have not had opportunity to become familiar with many of the games of English gentlemen. Bicycle I know and golf I have seen, but there are numberless British methods to take exercise and skill which I do not understand. The foxtrot ... the cricket ... the steeplechasing...."

"Singing and leaping!" interrupted Edna. "Well I never! The plot thickens, as they say. Do you think Mr. Cotton is cracked?"

"Who should crack him?" asked Chang Chu-lien anxiously. "It is certain there are no robbers in Kan Lu Pa...."

"Nothing is certain in this wicked world," said Edna. "It's my belief that that's what's happened, but I didn't like to mention it until you suggested it. He's been attacked and robbed. All his clothes are torn and thrown about there in the wood. He's been kidnapped. That was his shouts for help that you heard. I'll hop across to his wife and see if they know anything there. And if there's anything wrong, I'd better go and tell Mr. Diamond all I know."

Chang Chu-lien watched her go with a confused look on his amiable face. Then he thoughtfully seated himself on his machine and steered it in wild curves towards the police station.

The curves became wilder as he found himself approaching the doctor and Milady.

"Whither away, sonny?" screamed Milady as she and the doctor sprang apart to avoid being run over. "You look like a cat running after its own tail."

"I am going to the police," replied Chang Chu-lien, as he fell off once more on one leg. "It is probable that murder has been committed. Or at least kidnapping outrage."

"Murder!" shouted the doctor and Milady in enlivened voices.

"Or possibly suicide," added Chang Chulien. "Mr. Cotton is the misfortunate victim."

CHAPTER IX

Who now is her host?

Who now is her king?

She is drowned,

She is drowned in a ring

Of green stars. A round

Ripple of stars crowns her brow.

But oh—be forgotten now—

Ghost—ghost—

Be forgotten now—

Daley, sitting crying in her pavilion, had watched the Chinese wedding go by. She had seen the little bridegroom's face, tense with the consciousness of pomp, propped above stiff silk robes. And in all her confusion and sorrow, Daley had time to regret the fact that the procession was so inadequately pompous, that the banners were carried askew, that the music brayed like asses, and that a mud-encrusted buffalo, slobbering sadly, made the bright palanquin of the hidden bride ridiculous by its close pursuit. These things were real blasphemies, offences against rare secret glory.

Daley welcomed the procession because it saved her from tears for a few moments. She sought other saviours. How many beads were there on the chain round her neck? Seventy-three. How many joss-sticks were smoking in the cindery bowl beside her? Eighteen. How many different sounds were to be heard in the humming afternoon air? Flies—a dog barking—the wind in the barley—the chuckling voice of water running from one rice-field into another—the fading sound of the wedding music—the coming sound of footsteps....

Liu Sao-shing, the Chinese landlord, almost passed the pavilion without looking into it. It was not his habit to look at gods—certainly not at broken gods. But the bright colour of Daley's smock caught his averted eye. He looked round.

"Mrs. Cotton," he said. "I went to see Mr. Cotton, but he is not at his house."

He looked at her tearworn face much more fixedly than he ever looked at it when it was calm and ready to be looked at. "You have some illness of the eye?" he asked coldly.

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"No," said Daley. "I have been crying."

Liu Sao-shing snuffled loudly and then said, "I wished to tell Mr. Cotton that in my opinions I am not called upon to mend the roof over his printing press. The shaking of his machine has destroyed the plaster. It is not I who destroy plasters on my own properties."

"No," said Daley.

"Chinese houses," continued Liu Sao-shing, "are made of light materials; for Chinese persons this is strong enough. My properties is Chinese properties, and if foreigners put foreign machines in my properties, the responsibility of damages is not mine."

"No," said Daley. She looked at his quiet pale face. She thought she could not bear it if he spoke again. His mind seemed as far off as a fairy's mind.

"A framework of bamboo——" began Liu Sao-shing, but Daley interrupted him.

"Please, Mr. Liu, don't talk of these hard things to me now.... Dear Mr. Liu, can't you see I'm distracted—can't you see I'm in tears?"

How humiliating, to knock with grief upon the door of that calm far-away heart. She was shocked at herself. The broken god behind her had gentler eyes than Liu Sao-shing. The god's eyes had the saving grace of slight hysteria. It was not humiliating to grieve before him—though he was a kind of fairy too.

"I regret that you have troubles," said Liu Sao-shing, but he did not go away because he wanted to make his point about the plaster really clear.

"Why are you Chinese so far away from us?" asked Daley. "Haven't you tears like we have? Aren't there things you can't bear?"

"We do not know the hearts of foreigners," said Liu Sao-shing. "We do not wish to know. I went to mission school, not to learn foreign hearts but to learn foreign language. I learnt foreign language not to be friend of foreigners but to be business equal of foreigners. Chinese and foreign should not have sympathy to each other. Foreigners brought business thoughts to China—not friendship thoughts. Patriotic Chinese shall give business back—never friendship."

"Everything seems unknown," said Daley in a low broken voice. "What have I done that I should be lost in unknown things? America's the only country where people truly love each other and understand each other, Mr. Liu."

"Americans should stay in America," said Liu Sao-shing.

He stood quietly without fidgeting, without taking his eyes from her sad face, until he felt that he might, without offending etiquette, return to the subject of the plaster.

"If you will tell Mr. Cotton that in my opinions the plaster over his machine must be mended by the Mission," he said, "I shall be oblige. Then, if rain comes in to wet machine, I shall not have responsibilities for damages."

Daley made no reply. Liu Sao-shing snuffled and then, saying goodbye politely, he walked away.

Daley thought, "Comfort can't come out of the horrible old air of this side of the world." She thought of San Francisco, of the Ferry Building, the peanut and popcorn stalls, the gay billboards, people calling one another Sister and Mother and Dearie and Honey.... "People from these dangerous worlds couldn't know America," she thought. "Crooked subtle people couldn't find their way along such wunnerful straight streets as ours."

There are few colours and textures so delicious as those of a horse-chestnut fresh from its green casket. This was the colour and texture of an ox which drew a waggon slowly past Daley's shrine. And, though she was waiting for a comfort more tangible than loveliness, she looked through her tears at the ox's beautiful skin and happy pensive auburn face, and felt glad that there was room in cruel China for an animal so well-to-do. Then she saw that behind the Chinese waggoner walked Lion.

"Lion—Lion!"

Lion looked round with an almost gasping look of pleasure. It was plain that this meeting was of the kind that one imagines on happy sleepless nights but never expects.

"You angel," said Lion. "But you're crying."

"Well, don't let's talk of that now, Lion darling," said Daley. "Is that your ox? Where were you going with him?"

"I was coming to ask after the invalid, and to bring you a little present. It's a bit of a tree that I cut down in my compound, and by accident I found that it burns orange and blue. I don't know why. Anyway I thought you'd like some for your big fireplace."

"That's lovely of you, kindest of Lions. I simply adore fireworks. How wunnerful of the tree to have a secret gift like that—that people only knew of after it was dead."

She had risen without thinking from the stony throne of sorrow which she had vowed never to leave again. She whistled for Josephine, who had now returned from her maternal duties. Daley whistled like a boy. Lion's look of rapture made her feel a little drunk. So much of her life had been spent in simple delight that she could not all at once lose her habit of unthinking joy.

The waggon crushed and squelched in front of them over the drowned ridges and ruts. Freckles of sunlight and shadow slipped across Lion's face and gave a tremulousness to his expression of triumph. Daley meant to seek comfort from him, but somehow the fact that he was not quite so tall as she had remembered made her hesitate. Clifford's desertion would tear a rent in the warm cloak of approval in which Lion's eyes enwrapped her. And Lion had nothing more savage than his love with which to defend her from the cruel world. Her mind sprang away to something easy to think of and talk of.

"Josephine had four puppies last night. You wouldn't think it to look at her. Boniface, Pius, Clement and Innocent. Innocent's the girl. Josephine says—and I think so too—that Innocent's going to be a really remarkable dog. She has the most original way of sucking—and she always sleeps in a corner by herself.... How funny to think of an *always* that's only fifteen hours long...."

Lion was the only person among Daley's friends in Kan Lu Pa who really accepted the voices of dogs. He was so appreciative that often Josephine, Gregory and Cowslip actually spoke aloud in his presence, in Daley's smallest voice. Daley allowed this, not in a facetious mood, but simply to express the thoughts

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which she could so clearly read in her dogs' eyes. Sometimes the dogs spoke by mistake in the presence of Clifford or his mother or Mr. Lorne. But Daley always regretted such aberrations. In the light of the blank surprise of strangers, the transmitted squeakings of dogs seemed not dignified on the lips of an American housewife.

"I'll find it very hard to leave those puppies now," said Daley.

"Why—you're not thinking of leaving, are you?" This was unfair. This was Canada reversed.

"Oh, I must, I must.... Oh Lion, I'm in such trouble. Clifford doesn't love me any more. He's fallen in love with Lena and—oh Lion—she isn't half as nice as me...." She was crying again, thinking naively how nice she was.

"The scoundrel," said Lion in the traditional cramped bass voice. "But surely it's a mistake. *Clifford!* ... What makes you think so, Daley?"

With tears hanging in her eyes, Daley suddenly almost laughed. "What makes me think so?" Evidently there never had been another husband like Clifford. With ordinary husbands, thinkings and hopings and doubtings were to be presumed—shadowings and spyings and excuses. Real husbands lied, and deserved to be put across Mr. Ridley's knee and well spanked. But Clifford never lied; he made everything very clear and crude and turned his spectacles towards you to see if you completely understood. "What makes you think so?" That was what the wise motherly Mentor of the Heart-to-heart Column of the *Woman's Helpful Friend* would have asked. How bald would a true answer look in the Heart-to-heart Column. The Love Mentor would probably go out of business. Wise tenderness and Ridley sanity alike were out of place in this bewitched Cotton family. This was what happened if one left the land of Helpful Friends and came to live among the fantastic and stonyhearted.

"Why," said Daley, "he told me so."

"But ... it's fantastic...."

"It is. It is. That's just what's so dreadful about it." She added after a moment, "It's so fantastic that perhaps it'll over-reach itself. Perhaps he'll be so fantastic as to love me soon again."

"There's always a chance that Lena will die," said Lion, and ground his teeth. This shocked Daley a good deal, because the possibility had crossed her own mind several times.

"Oh Lion, don't talk like that."

"Why not? We have to hope for the downfall of enemies if we are human. And if we are honest we ought to admit it. I know I've often wanted every man who looked kindly at you to die the next minute."

"Oh don't, Lion. I'd be absolutely miserable with no one looking at me," said Daley, as she skipped along thinking of kind looks. Her tears were almost dry.

"If I could put an end to Lena without being legally guilty of murder," said Lion judicially, "I'd do it without thinking twice about it." If he had been in the company of unloved friends he would have talked for some time like a little Nietzsche. But somehow he could not feel himself quite interesting enough to talk like that in the presence of Daley. "In fact," he added pensively, "I don't suppose I'd have to think more than about four times before I'd commit real murder—for you, Daley...."

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"Oh surely you'd feel a little prick of pity...."

"Not a prick," he said firmly and proudly. For a moment they were both fancying the heroic murder done. Lion—manly fellow—sought no applause. Daley felt illogical womanly regrets. "Poor Lena—her head has lain on my best guest-pillows—the ones Mrs. Ridley embroidered daisies on the corners of...."

"I couldn't get away from pity," she said aloud. "I'm eaten up with pity, nearly always ... even for beetles ... and the ricksha men you don't hire ... and tyrants and things.... It's a sort of tenderheartedness that lives quite apart from love. If Lena was in terror of death, I'd put my own terrors into her.... I couldn't help it.... Exactly like spiders.... Of course a spider when it falls into the bath doesn't really say to itself—'My God—is there no hope then, does my nice warm life end here? Shall I never spin a web or eat a fly again?' But my thoughts are thinking for it—my words are in its mouth—can't keep my thoughts and my words where they belong. In my mind the spider is praying in agony.... And so, though I hate spiders, I have to put in my shrinking finger and let it crawl out of the water. And it says in my thoughts,—'So God *does* answer prayer, after all. Mother was right.'"

Lion said, "And I dare say that *is* how God answers prayer—just if He happens to notice. I dare say His finger shrinks just as yours does, as we crawl wetly out of our dangers. But we puff ourselves out and get dry and proud and flatter ourselves He loves us and has preserved us for a special purpose, as we begin to spin our webs again. And then perhaps the next minute the feather broom sweeps everything away. God's hand is not outstretched to us that time, so we curse Him and die...."

"Oh that's cynicism, Lion," said Daley with distaste and awe. "You mustn't start being cynical or, as a good American, I'll not have anything to do with you. Queer, about cynicism.... Every one except Americans seems to be content to have the world sad and bad and not do anything about it. Americans don't waste time being cynical—they start to make the world better. Think of all the inspiring messages flying about in the air of America—all the deep helpful thoughts about theosophy and the message of the Great War to future generations and psycho-analysis and Rabindranath Tagore and how one can bring the spirit of Jesus into business. I think it's just fine that deep constructive thinking should be so popular—the favourite indoor sport of a great country like America.... Your European way of just sitting back and registering cynicism is such an *easy* way; Americans are strenuous people and they despise easy ways. Not *me*, of course.... I've lost the knack of high helpful thinking. I think about insects and dogs and what it would feel like to be a queen ... or a dipsomaniac ... or a sea-anemone when a big wave's coming.... Nobody ever expects high thinking of me in England or China, so I've grown rather silly, like a real English wife...."

"But Daley darling, American popular high thinking so often *is* the easy way, the short cut. These inspiring messages are really short cuts to an appearance of thinking for the busy house-wife—not to real thinking. Like the advertisements in your magazines about a man who wanted to seem as if he had read widely in order to be a success at dinner-parties, so—instead of actually reading widely—he swotted up Somebody or Other's Mammoth Hotch-potch of the world's masterpieces and was a great social success.... People who think for themselves get cynical, because they have to take the rough thinking with the smooth, so to speak. Your kind of high thinking is like a patent food sweetened and prepared for the weakest digestion. Far better to think about queens and sea-anemones as you do, bless you.... I'm so glad you've lost the knack of high helpful thinking...."

"Oh I've lost everything good and American," said Daley bitterly, "since I married a fairy. And now ... if he's left me ... I've lost both my old soul and my new...."

Lion took her hand in his and they walked thus, linked together, in the light shade of the bamboos.

Josephine fitted her nose like a cork into a mousehole. She blew down the hole, perhaps to asphyxiate the mouse, and then inhaled deeply. She wagged her tail, showing that she was confident that the mouse would be caught by this method, would swoon and be sucked by her strong upward snuffling to the mouth of the hole, as lemonade is sucked up a straw. "If only dogs knew a little more natural science ..." thought Daley vaguely with half her mind. "But then the world would be impossible for mice."

There was a long silence. Lion could not quite understand it, but he felt it to be tragic and—not, of course, connecting it with mice—acquiesced in it with a sore heart.

As they passed the gate of Mr. Diamond's compound, Daley shook her head, gave a quick sigh and stood still. "I want to go and tell Mr. Diamond...."

"Tell him what?" asked Lion, stung.

"I can't rest," said Daley slowly, "till I feel a little more comforted. I—"

"Oh Daley—don't I comfort you? Don't you feel how much I love you and sorrow for you? What could old Diamond say that I can't say? He'd use smoother words perhaps—he'd pat your hand and talk about your beautiful eyes...."

"But that's what I want. That's what I want. I don't want to be loved—I want to be comforted. I want to be told my eyes are beautiful. I want to be told it isn't my fault that Clifford—" her voice broke. In a moment she added, "And I want him to help me to go home.... It's a consul's business—isn't it?—to help travellers who are lost to go home. I must—I must go back to America—quickly—before my heart breaks.... I want to be safe again, and good again, and to understand the things that happen to me. I want to be where people never sneer. Oh Lion, all the time there's a picture in my mind of a straight boulevard, all gay with billboards on both sides—billboards that screen it from the horrible unknown mountains—a boulevard so straight you can see to the end of it—and there are darling vulgar movie palaces at the end...."

And in that instant, the whole aspect of Canada changed in Lion's secret sight. Canada, the sanctuary from the cruel beloved, the refuge where the pain of a broken heart was deadened by a drug distilled from the sweat of an honest brow—Canada was transformed. Here in its place was a Canada spread out like a magic carpet for the feet of lovers, a scene set for a great romance. The leaden sun of Canada was turned to gold. The garment of Canada was changed, as the garment of a room is changed when the lights are lit.

"But come with me, Daley darling.... I'll take you where you want to go.... I'll take you to a happy country—movies or mountains—you shall choose. I've got my savings. I'll work for you. I'll love you—"

"But I don't want love," insisted Daley. "I've got love. I'm nearly dead of love. I want friends—hundreds and hundreds of friends—the kind that laugh and send each other flowers and read nice magazines and help wash up the plates after supper and know each other's hearts. I was happy in America where I was allowed to understand things and feel good—and if I can get back to America I'll understand again and

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love goodness again—and then I shall be comforted. I want all this horror explained away. I want some one to say—'It was this way—it was that way—it was a joke—it was quite a normal thing that might have happened even in America—do this or do that, Daley, and you can easily be happy again....' Mr. Diamond'll help me to get comforted—once he knows my pain. He's so wise. I must see him. D'you want to wait for me a little while, Lion darling, or d'you think I'm not worth waiting for?"

"I could never think that," said Lion in a low voice. "Wherever you go, you can be sure always that I shall be waiting for you."

As Daley ran up Mr. Diamond's path, Lion stood outside the gate soundlessly rehearsing a few tense and devoted phrases. His heart swelled with love. His eyes were surveying his new kingdom of Canada. The new Canada in his mild imagination still showed the same fixtures as the old, still disclosed that scene furnished with a long trail laid towards snowy mountains, with high dark pine forests to the right and long pale prairies to the left. The scene had long been haunted by a ghost of his sad lone self, a ghost crushed with unattainable love, a brave celibate ghost, who should be the champion of all lost causes.... But now along that track between forest and prairie, he and Daley rode towards the mountains, home from the movies in the gay little lighted town that Daley had added to Canada in a breath—home to a log cabin—home to a bright fire and glinting rustic furnishings, enclosed by rough but airtight walls built by Lion's strong arm—home to a supper of wild venison eaten on a gate-legged table with a bowl of wild flowers in the middle—home to endless intimate improving talks on modern politics. And then—the thought of Canadian bedtime one reserved till bedtime. It was too ecstatic a thought to be entertained under the silly sun.

Lion's ear, attuned to the low sounds of a dream, was brought back suddenly to China by the sound of some large body moving clumsily about in the bamboo grove at a little distance. The noise made him vaguely uneasy. Somehow the blundering haste of the tread suggested the haste of a fugitive. But he could hear no pursuer.

As he listened he heard Daley's quick step in Mr. Diamond's garden, and she came out looking a little crestfallen.

"He's not there," she said.

The sunlight over Daley's home seemed to be coloured by misery as she saw again the familiar curved roof. The roof seemed to sag a little and was the colour of a dead leaf—a forgotten leaf with winter hanging over it.

"What is Lion, after all? What is Mr. Diamond, after all? What is America, after all? There is no comfort anywhere in the world." She wanted nothing but the large hard glorious Clifford. She remembered his strong hair, his love of oatmeal porridge, his meditative way of looking at himself in the mirror in the morning, as he put on his unsuccessful clothes. She remembered his loud exaggerated yawns in the evening—"Hee—ha—haw—ya," deliberately loud, intended as a blustering hint, as a happy introduction of the happy night. "He'd be very gentle with Lena in everything," thought Daley. "Always careful—never easy. In all that he says and does now, he must never be rough or vulgar or coarse or natural.... He was never careful with me"—she flushed with pride—"I was his kind—I was strong and rather vulgar ... he could never hurt me while he still loved me. Yes—there was only one way he could hurt me, and that's the way he's chosen...." The thought of his gross strength wrung her heart; she

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remembered his great leather bedroom slippers beside her bed, his discordant rapturous snorting in his bath, his hairy arms and breast.... Every other man was after all an enemy—because he was not Clifford.

She was startled by Lion's loud voice beside her. "Oh, look—oh look ..."

She looked first at Lion and was held for a second by his shocked astonished face. "Lion would be a terribly careful lover," she thought. Then she said, "Look what at?" She turned her face this way and that way, but she could see nothing except the erratic aisles of the grove. Sometimes those aisles seemed to lead the whole world to her home, as though to a universal centre. But to-day all the crooked avenues seemed to lead away from the house, drawing out of it all familiar spirits. "What did you see, Lion?"

After a moment's pause Lion replied, "Oh nothing. I thought—but I was mistaken."

"One of old Mother Cotton's fairies, maybe," said Daley bitterly.

"Probably," said Lion with a careful smile.

He had seen Clifford Cotton running naked through the grove.

CHAPTER X

With safe shod feet you touch

The world whereon you pass,

But to forget the grass

Is to forget too much.

Behind your brow your brittle

And bubble thoughts are blown,

But to know thoughts alone

Is to know too little.

Lion was chopping wood. To do so was to-day's interpretation of his passion for Daley. He would allow no coolie to touch that sacred log. A Chinese gardener, bare to the waist under a huge varnished straw hat, hopefully watched the increasing mess of chips from a distance. To-morrow's rice would be cooked for the gardener's family over those chips.

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The sunlight had become very red. Within the mansion of a pomegranate tree, bird lodgers were sharing confidential chuckles as they prepared to sleep. The pale dog Cowslip sat looking rather theatrically pink in a red ray, watching the wood-chopping with frozen alarm. Anything unusual appalled Cowslip. On seeing any one walk backwards or sit on a hat or try to fold up a deck chair, Cowslip would run for miles. Once when old Mrs. Cotton had had new false teeth and was unable to speak without whistling, Cowslip had been lost for two days. Mr. Diamond said that Cowslip's psychology explained the Diehard party.

Lion's arms, as he chopped, were nerved by anger against Clifford. He felt angry, incredulous and confused. Everything seemed to have happened suddenly and insanely. Only yesterday, when Lion last came to remind the Cottons that he had decided to chuck everything and go to Canada, the family had been perfectly normal. Not that Lion had ever approved of the tenour that passed for normal in Daley's family. Daley had never been enough loved; the old mother-in-law was malicious or mad, Clifford was consistently outrageously rude. All Daley's remarks were left drowning in pools of cold silence. To Lion she always seemed to enter rooms with a bright light in her eyes and a song on her lips—and always, after a moment in the presence of her husband and his mother, the light was veiled and the song was stilled. She had become used to expecting nothing. Even to be answered seemed to delight her. Still, though it was heartrending, it was certainly normal. It is perfectly normal for husbands to be unworthy of lovely wives. Lion always believed that some day Clifford would die painlessly and leave Daley free, after a short but picturesque widowhood, to marry Lion. Short of this consummation, Lion had hitherto harboured no hopes. His Respect for Womanhood was too strong. And he had really been very happy politely wishing that Clifford were dead and dreaming of Daley at night. But now all kinds of rebellions and rude hopes were in his mind. He had a pain of bewilderment in his throat. Daley deserted and in tears.... Clifford prancing naked about the grove ... consular funds to transport the beloved to America—these dangerous symptoms seemed to elude diagnosis by Lion's tragic optimism. As he chopped, he reconstructed in his memory his outrageous glimpse of Clifford. No reason for Clifford's behaviour suggested itself to Lion, but at least, whatever the reason was, one could be sure that it was an exceedingly ungentlemanly one. Probably some nameless decadent orgy. And yet decadent orgies did not seem to fit into the same thought as Clifford. Clifford's appetites were so obviously healthy. Nothing nameless could appeal to Clifford—he liked names so much. And besides, he was so proud of his clothes. He was always showing people how all the buttons at the wrists of his coatsleeves really undid. "Some people's are fakes," Clifford had once told Lion. "I know, because I once asked a man in the Peak Tram in Hongkong if his undid too, and they didn't." It was indeed just conceivable that Clifford had simply taken off his clothes in the grove for the pleasure of putting them on again. And yet it was unlikely, since, to Clifford, the conventions were so very important. His friends were never allowed to forget his hero and model, the Shanghai bank manager. Perhaps, thought Lion, Clifford had actually gone mad. The doctor had several times hinted to Lion—as one admirer of Daley's to another—that he didn't like the look of things in the Cotton family—that there was latent insanity somewhere. But Lion, though he disliked Clifford, could never really believe that he was mad. Mad people believed that they were the King of Israel or a hardboiled egg or the victim of a gunpowder plot. But Clifford's one obsession was ordinariness. This seemed to Lion to point to an almost excessive sanity.

But—naked in the forest.... Where was the Shanghai bank manager now?

The dog Cowslip gave a little squeak and sprang aside as though he had sat upon a thorn. Lion, looking up, saw Lena huddled in the window-seat of her room, quite close to him, looking sombrely out.

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"Was it your voice that cried, 'Oh look—oh look'—half an hour ago?"

"May have been," mumbled Lion. He looked at his chopper and felt rather foolish as he remembered his homicidal boastings. Funny how inconceivable killing was.... Yet sinners are so soft and choppers so hard. Something beside morality, chivalry and fear protected the soft skins of men and women from the blades of choppers. He felt more at ease with Lena now he knew that she was frail, that she could make Daley cry and that she deserved death. But unluckily Lena could not take advantage of this increased ease. She felt no need to be promiscuously womanly now. Yet she looked at him with some pleasure. He was stroking his little moustache and looking at her with a wan earnest look. She thought that his face was full of goodness and high principles. He was bravely judging the world, yet he would be too polite to punish wickedness with that chopper of his. The high-principled, she thought, were really in an awkward position. Goodness restrained them from logically justifying their goodness.

"What were you Oh-look-oh-looking at?" she asked.

"I forget.... Some little unexpected thing I saw beneath the trees."

"Your cry woke me up—and seemed terribly urgent to me," said Lena. "If you don't tell me what you saw, I shall imagine worse and worse." Her dreams were still humming in her head.

Lion plaited blades of grass most carefully between his fingers. "You see," he said with a little difficulty, "I don't much care what you imagine."

He was not used to being rude. He felt that he was somehow protecting Daley, yet a pulse of nervousness beat in his throat. It was no use pretending to be a little Nietzsche when it came to the point.

Lena flushed. As a rule her obvious fragility and sadness protected her from brutality as it protected her from tenderness. For a moment she almost said something spontaneously appealing, but she checked herself. "I suppose Daley has been enlisting your chivalrous sympathies," she said. "And I am sure they were willing recruits."

Lion bent his face lower towards his fidgeting fingers and the blades of grass. "Oh I know you think me a sentimental kind of an ass," he said. "Perhaps I am." He thought, "Why am I so damn humble?" He reminded himself of his triumphs in the world of men. He remembered Rollo Fane, the "Greatest Economic Expert of Our Generation," hitting him robustly on the shoulder-blade and saying, "By Jove, young man, if there were more like you ...!" He remembered a young woman who took a minor part in a repertory company in Leeds. She said once, "You're the kind of man whom women'll always listen to, whatever you say.... Something *strong* and *compelling*...." He drew himself up and put on an independent magnetic look, as he said to Lena, "But one thing is very clear to me, and that is that Daley needs protection just now. She is suffering from a kind of invasion of malice and queerness."

"She doesn't need protection from me," said Lena, thinking a glowing thought of Daley's face. "It's my being queer that protects her from me. If I was an everyday tart, she'd have no chance at all."

Lion felt embarrassed and full of hatred. "After all," he thought, "she can't establish any actual superiority, she has no right to say things one can't answer." Aloud he said, "It seems to me a damn shame that queer things should be able to break the heart of a sweet normal thing like Daley." There were tears somewhere behind his eyes, but luckily, he thought, Lena could not see them.

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"Oh don't worry, she'll score in the end," said Lena. "No sweet and normal thing ever really suffers more than it can bear. Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes—she shall have music wherever she goes.... No, Lion, rather pity the queer. They must wake to another kind of music."

Lion stiffened. Appeals for sympathy from women who were not Daley seemed to him fatiguing and even disgusting, at the moment. "I dare say you're right," he said vaguely and his eyes wandered about. He was all tense, all ready to answer one appeal—and one only. He had always dreamed that some day Daley would cry to him with tears, "Oh save me, Lion, save me." And he would call, "I'm here, Daley...." The thought of tears in her eyes intoxicated him with a sort of glorious poison. His throat became rigid with delight at the thought. "Oh save me, Lion, save me...." It was a thing he would die to hear her say. His ecstasy was checked as he remembered that unfortunately she said it quite often. It was one of her expressions. When the lamp smoked badly, or when her hair was caught in a bramble, or when Gregory the puppy relieved nature on the drawingroom floor just as the Chinese Magistrate was announced—again it was, "Oh save me, Lion, save me...." She took in vain the darling cry that he had consecrated to her. Such sweet blasphemies were part of her, he knew; nevertheless they did prick his precarious and essential dignity as a lover.

Lena did not know how tiresome to him was the sound of her sad voice. "Oh," she said, "how delightful it must be to be sweet and normal, and be under the protection of God and man."

"You see," said Lion with another effort, "I love Daley. She's a creature made to be loved. And love—er—gives a man wisdom and all that.... I'm convinced that, whatever may have happened within the last twenty-four hours, Clifford Cotton loves her too. The *man* in him must love her——"

"Certainly the *man* in a man couldn't love me," admitted Lena. "Only the queerness—the fairy—in a man could love me."

"I'm not talking about you," persisted Lion. "I don't know about your affairs and—excuse me—I don't very much want to. Except in so far as they affect Daley's happiness."

"Well, if you are right," said Lena slowly, "I have reason to believe there is more fairy than man in Clifford Cotton...."

"It seems there is—for the moment," said Lion bitterly. "If it's any satisfaction to you to know that you've seduced a beastly will-o'-the-wisp from his marriage vows—you're welcome to it."

"It is," said Lena. "Quite a lot of satisfaction. Even a will-o'-the-wisp is something...."

"Then go and catch him and take him to the devil where he belongs," shouted Lion. "You'll find him in the wood. I wish you joy of him. It's more than any decent woman could expect of him...."

Lena put her face on her arms and began to cry. "Oh what a cruel thing," she cried amid hoarse dry sobs. "What a cruel thing love is...."

Lion was so suddenly repentant that he was almost giddy. He knelt outside her low window, stroking her arm, stroking her hair. "I'm a brute—I'm a brute," he stammered. "It's because I'm so unhappy myself that I'm a brute. I wish love hadn't been cruel to you...." He felt almost joyful when she sobbed no more. "I really am sorry," he said again and again. "I really am sorry for you, Lena. I'd help you if I could. But please, please keep away from Clifford Cotton. He's such easy game because he's so queer—but you'll

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get nothing out of him but queerness. Get away from here and find a real love. Take the advice of a pal, Lena, and get away from here...."

Lena lifted up her face. Her eyes were dry. She was laughing—"Fff-ff...." And as Lion stood up outraged, they heard steps outside the garden gate. Lena drew herself up and went back from the window. Lion chopped wood with renewed savagery. He felt sick with anger and unhappiness.

"Women really are either Daley or else they're devils," he thought. He felt obliged to picture again the pleasing scene with Rollo Fane, the Great Economic Expert. "By Jove, young man, if there were more like you...." Lion chopped wood more manfully.

Mr. Diamond's voice interrupted him. "Splendid, splendid, splendid," said Mr. Diamond looking at him thoughtfully. "I *love* energy. You're always full of beans, old man. I *love* bea—I mean I *love* energy." He was rubbing the back of his neck with a look of uncertainty unnatural to him. Behind him, like secretly rebellious sheep behind a sheepdog, stood Milady, Edna, the doctor and Chang Chu-lien.

"Shall I find Daley here?" asked Mr. Diamond. "I want to ask her if she knows anything about the truth of these extraordinary rumours. But I don't want her frightened. Certainly not. Certainly not. I want you all to promise me to say nothing whatever about the matter, if you see her."

"She's on the terrace," said Lion. "I know she wants to speak to you. She's been looking for you."

Mr. Diamond stepped quickly away saying, "Give me a few minutes alone with her, will you." The dog Cowslip followed him, wrinkling his nose snobbishly at Chang Chu-lien. Cowslip was an imperialist and thought that natives of any Asiatic state should not be admitted to Nordic circles on terms of social equality. To him all Chinese were equally toothworthy.

"Oh my dear, such goings on!" said Milady. "How much does the poor soul know, I wonder...."

"What goings on? What poor soul?" asked Lion.

"Why, the widow."

"Oh get along, Milady, do," said Edna. "You do run on so."

"Better run on than never get a move on at all," retorted Milady.

"But whose widow? What are you talking about?" asked Lion.

"Clifford Cotton's widow," said Milady, Edna and Chang Chu-lien all together.

"Haven't you heard?" continued Milady. "He's committed suicide. We've just taken Mr. Diamond to look at the scene of the crime. The bloodstained clothes are all over the place——"

"Not bloodstained," said the doctor, who carried the clothes in a neat pile on his arm. "But all trampled over with muddy little foot-marks—like rabbits or monkeys, only there are no rabbits or monkeys here."

"Well, it's not likely your rabbits and monkeys have cut his throat for him, is it?" exclaimed Milady, embittered by this tiresome exactness. "And Julian here heard him howling and moaning——"

"I heard him call in loud voice—'Oh death—Oh horror—Oh let me de cease'——" said Chang Chu-lien vivaciously. "At least, I *think* this was his very words. At the time I thought it was English song he sang,

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but I did not then know seriousness of situation. However, I think no cause to despair until we find corpse."

Lion suddenly noticed Lena's open window. "Come further away," he said, waving the chopper in a bewildered way. Thoughts raced like panicstricken children across his mind and the foremost thought was, "Have I seen a ghost?" Then he thought. "Anyway, I won't tell these silly women anything. I'll manoeuvre to get old Diamond and the doctor alone."

"I think he was kidnapped," said Edna. "A ruffian went by me in a carrying chair as quick as the coolies could run. And behind him some more coolies carried another chair that was closed up every chink—and I thought I heard a moan——"

"Oh that was the wedding of Liu's little cousin," said the doctor. "He was to be married today. I fixed the little chap's tonsils last year, so I know."

"Well ..." said Edna doubtfully. "That's as may be. Anyway I can tell you one thing—Mr. Cotton's old mother knows something, but she's a close old party, she won't let on. I saw her standing by her gate. She was mumbling something about music and I said to her: 'D'you know where Mr. Cotton is, Mrs. Cotton?' And she said: 'He has been stolen away.' I said, 'Whatever do you mean, Mrs. Cotton? Has somethink happened to him?' And she said, 'Oh nothink much,' she said, 'nothing worse than death. Nothing half so bad as America.' Well, as you may suppose, I said, 'Well my goodnerce me, Mrs. Cotton, don't talk like that. Whatever makes you think about death?' But she wouldn't give a straight answer, she just stammered out something about a changeling—'The changeling's gone home,' she said."

Mr. Diamond, arriving on Daley's terrace, had found her sitting on a cushion on the grass in front of the kennel in the attitude of a child. Her eyes were fixed on the puppies in the kennel and her lips were moving. The puppies were groping about in an intruding ray of low light, wimming on their stomachs, wagging their heavy heads. Daley did not smile, she silently shaped her lips to the futile grumblings and bewilderments of puppies in a new world. She was the chorus of the enrapturing drama. Mr. Diamond heard her say, "In a jelly of warmth, like quails in aspic...."

"Directly I got in," said Mr. Diamond, "I knew you'd been to see me. Two of my hollyhocks were broken. 'The usual squad of Cotton dogs,' I said, and my heart was almost as broken as a hollyhock to think perhaps you'd wanted me and I wasn't there."

"Don't be irreverent, dear Mr. Diamond," said Daley in a restrained voice. "My dogs aren't talked of in squads. You don't talk of gods in squads, do you, or of squads of ladies you have loved?"

"There is only one God," said Mr. Diamond, "And only one beloved lady. And they don't break my hollyhocks."

"You don't understand dogs or gods or ladies either," said Daley.

Mr. Diamond perceived that the necessary smile was not such a broad one as usual. "She has some suspicion of this affair," he thought, and he said, "I know a lady who's got trouble on her mind. And I hope she'll honour the humblest of her admirers by telling him all about it and letting him do what he can."

He could see that she had been crying, but his sympathy was hampered by the fact that there was nowhere for him to sit. There was, of course, the great round world on which Daley was seated, but the world is no seat for a British Consul. He could not very well sit on the verandah and shout serene consolation across fifteen yards. Daley seemed to have no intention of rising and exchanging puppies for sympathy. Mr. Diamond, after stroking the seat of his white riding breeches in regretful anticipation, sat down beside her.

Daley was silent for a minute and Mr. Diamond added, "It wouldn't be friendly not to tell me, Daley. More than anything in the world I should like to consider myself your trusted friend. That's what I'd value. Yes, I'd value that."

Daley thought, "Curious—that doesn't really comfort me a bit." She wanted to cry wildly on his shoulder, but she remembered how tears had obscurely repelled him this morning and she knew that she must behave like a perfect lady. "The trouble with my trouble," she said, "is that there's nothing to be done about it. Clifford doesn't love me any more. The only thing I can do now is to go back home to America...."

"It would take a lot to make me believe that," said Mr. Diamond. "Nobody who'd known you and Clifford for the last three years and been fond of you both could believe that."

"But he says he loves Lena now. He *says* so, dear Mr. Diamond, and he—*does* so...."

Mr. Diamond for about a minute sought for a wise grave elderly thing to say. To gain time he began, "Now I'm going to talk to you as an old friend, Daley, as a man about twice your age and a hundred times more experienced. I think that no women—not even women who have known men all their lives—not even the most perfect of wives—ever really know anything about men. Now men, my dear, are very imperfect animals—you must have noticed it, kind though you are. A man can't live on perfection—he's essentially imperfect, and he can't. Women are different. The only imperfect thing about women is that their goodness blinds them to the imperfections of men. Perhaps we ought to thank God that it is so. You wouldn't love us if you knew us, my dear. Now Daley, if you had a doggie that you loved and that loved you, and if that doggie ran away from you for a day or two and gave itself up to doggie ways—would you turn it away when it came back? ... Granted that you'd been a perfect mistress to your doggie—couldn't you forgive him for not being able to be a perfect doggie to you? Men are animals—you can't get away from that—you must allow them their share of original sin. I don't believe there's a man alive—a real man, I mean, a manly man, with red blood in his veins—who can be faithful in thought all his life to one woman—even if she's a perfect woman as so many women are. Men must have their little escapades, if only to prove to themselves how lucky they are in their wives. Now I'll tell you what I think. You and Clifford have had some little tiff, and just at the height of the tiff the name of this dangerous Miss What's-er-name comes up. And Clifford, being a mere man, says all kinds of things that he doesn't mean, and you take it all seriously, being what you are—bless you—as straight as a die and as frank as the day."

"Oh Mr. Diamond," exclaimed Daley; "you're a wunnerful man for making things sound good. But my trouble won't fit—truly it won't. You see, Clifford's really been unfaithful to me. We've had no tiff, we've had a real parting. He's forsaken me."

"Forsaken you!" cried Mr. Diamond, thinking unhappily of the battle-scene in the grove.

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But the word *forsaken* again seemed to Daley too fatal to leave unmodified. It sounded too real. *Forsaken*. That would mean that she was lost indeed, that this drug of comfort that she sought must be but a temporary anæsthetic at the best. *Forsaken*. The word was like the tolling of a funeral bell in the ears of one who had loved chimes and peals.

"Well—he's hurt me—he's hurt me—he's hurt me ..." she cried in a cracked voice. "And he's not come back to comfort me. He isn't sorry. He doesn't want to comfort me. He said he didn't love me any more and then he went away."

"He's sulking," said Mr. Diamond bravely. "He's sulking. No, he's facing it out alone. He has that animal craving to be alone in his time of weakness. He's ashamed of himself and he's got to get away and have it out with himself. By God, it's a difficult thing for a man to come back to his wife and say he's been a cad—but that's what Clifford's going to do—if I know him—that's what he's nerving himself to do before he's many hours older. I know men, you see, my dear; we're all cads, more or less, and every time we realise that, it hits us pretty hard. But this Miss Thingummy-bob, she's the invalid pianist, isn't she? What does she say about it all? You've got her right under your thumb at home, I suppose?"

"Yes, she's too sick to leave my home—but she's not too sick to break up my happiness...."

"There—you see!" said Mr. Diamond triumphantly. "She's nothing to him. He's turned his back on her. He's facing it out alone, like the fine fellow he is. And it's to you that he'll come back, my dear."

"No, he won't come back—to me," said Daley.

Mr. Diamond took no notice of this. "And again," he said. "The whole thing may be some freak of Clifford's. He can't—come to think of it—possibly have any serious feeling for a woman he only met last night. He's a freakish blighter. Always was. Probably wanted to frighten you as he did once before when he set the wash-house on fire. That *was* a foolish freak, if you like. He overdoes his freakishness. Not a doubt of that. Not a doubt. Nott a doubt. Nottt—"

"He won't come back," interrupted Daley, "And oh—what is to become of me—what is to become of me?"

"Now Daley dear—don't become hysterical. Don't lose your sense of proportion. Think. Thinkk. Even if the worst came to the worst—which it won't, remember—you must keep your sense of proportion. I don't know a woman with more resilience—with more independence than you—a woman more full of vitality and courage and gaiety—a woman with a life fuller of interests and resources. Look at all your friends who love you—and I hope you'll let me count myself as one of them, my dear—look how happy you are with your flowers—your doggies—your music—your books.... Whatever happened, life for you, Daley, would be always well worth living. You're not one of those weak clinging—"

"Oh but I *am*—I *am* ..." cried Daley. She seized one of the puppies and held it up to her face. "Oh—what a tiny tiny tree for me to cling to...."

"Daley dear, control yourself. There are people coming. Tell me one thing. Do you know where Clifford is at this moment?"

"I don't *want* to know," sobbed Daley. "I don't *want* to know. Oh Mr. Diamond, don't make me know—let me not know."

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She hid her wet eyes in the puppy's fur as Lion, the doctor, Milady and Edna came up.

"We want beer," said the doctor, rather overdoing the necessary heartiness. Lion caught the infection. "Beer, beer, beer!" he cried.

"Beer, beer, beer, splendid, splendid, splendid!" said Mr. Diamond who was a little afraid of Lion. They all smiled broadly and cautiously upon one another.

In a few minutes the doctor, holding a glass of beer in one hand and Daley's elbow in the other, drew her into the drawingroom. This he did in response to Lion's expressed wish for a few moments in which to give further information about Clifford to Mr. Diamond.

"About this bronchially inclined lady visitor of yours, Mrs. Cliff," he said, "I've been talking things over with her friends, but I didn't like to say anything definite until I'd seen you. Her friends say they have to leave tomorrow. It seems to me out of the question that she should go with them. She's pretty sick and that's a fact. Question is—shall she be brought over to the hospital? You know what the hospital's like—full of howling Chinks—no nurses—just the Chink orderlies. How d'you feel about keeping her here? Mrs. Lorne could look after her most of the day, though she has to get back at night to her own kiddies. I don't think our patient really needs attention at night—though perhaps tonight if she still has fever—"

"She must stay—of course she must stay," said Daley—giving voice to the Ridley spirit without a minute's hesitation. "And I'm quite ready to sit up with her tonight. I'm a wunnerful sitter-up." She faltered a little at the end of the sentence, but that was only because the thought had crossed her mind, "If I sleep in her room, at least it prevents Clifford from doing the same."

"I knew you'd say that," said the doctor, delighted with her goodnature, which seemed somehow to flatter his own perspicacity. "No, no, Mrs. Cliff, I'm not going to let you go yet. I want to see the patient.... I want to give you a few instructions about cupping.... Here's Mrs. Lorne coming back from her family duties. We'll have a consultation...."

He smiled into the face of his watch all the time he was counting the beats of Lena's pulse, and Mrs. Lorne was much gratified by the smile. "Not very much wrong with her, is there Doctor?" said Mrs. Lorne, her smile unconsciously copying his, but her carefully bright voice giving him a cue of brightness to follow in reply.

"There's congestion, of course," said the doctor buoyantly. "And a little fever—but that's only to be expected. I'll tell you what, young lady, you're not to think of moving from your bed until I give you the word. Keep warm. Keep warm. Keep warm. That's all you've got to remember."

"Oh indeed yes," said Mrs. Lorne. "The hot-water-bottle leaks. But easily borrowed." She was delighted to hear him call her sister's child 'young lady.' "Minnie was right about her effect on the gentlemen and besides he's not married." She said, "Lena feels the wee-est bittie better this afternoon, don't you girlie?"

But Lena would not answer. She looked fixedly across at the paling open window, as if waiting for more dreadful news to come in upon the light warm wind. "Suicide ... suicide.... Clifford Cotton and suicide...." Her ears still seemed to ring with the word *suicide*. Milady's voice had sent the word like a sharp dagger twanging through the air.

"It doesn't matter," she thought painfully. "It doesn't really matter to a cold heart like mine. Perhaps to my poor body it matters—that his strong firelike body should die. But I had no right to him, I have no right to mind that he is dead. I have given reluctant ghosts of myself to all passers-by, to all lovers and haters ... and every time death makes a passer-by forget—there is one more ghost of me called home ... one more traitor who will never again betray me. What a safeguard for the living is death. But oh—his body—his body that was a safeguard against death—his living body is dead...."

"This woman is a sulky devil," thought the doctor, looking at Lena's grim face. But he still wore his smile, ready for Daley. "I'll call my assistant in. I want him to show you two ladies how to cup the patient's chest. Hey, Julian."

He whispered to Chang Chu-lien at the door, "And mind, not a word about her husband. She'll know all in good time."

"Whose husband?" asked Chang Chu-lien in a loud anxious voice. "Ah—you refer to this before-mentioned mystery? I am entirely discreet." He put down a little jingling box and bowed to Daley, bowed to Lena, bowed to Mrs. Lorne. As he bowed to Daley he said, "Cheery-ho, Mrs. Cotton, you have exceedingly lovely garden. I enjoy my little promenade in it while I wait for doctor's summons."

He was strangely divided from them. Half-concealed uncertainty held him aloof from them, though he tried to say only safe English things. "You wish me to cup patient, Doctor?" he asked with gentle cheekiness. "By all means. I have the cups in this box. But I require cotton wool. The lady must not be anxious. The affair shall be exceedingly painless."

"How lonesome we all are," thought Daley, watching his cautious grin. "How far away we all are from friends. Something's scared him, same as something's scared me. He's scared of our magic, same as I'm scared of his. Every one's unknown. Everyone's dangerous."

Chang Chu-lien deftly lighted wool in the glasses and pressed the rims down with his thin clever hands upon Lena's upper chest. The skin was drawn up into little domes under the glasses as the flames were stifled. "It does not do the lady even the smallest damage," said Chang Chu-lien with modest triumph. "Modern science is exceedingly marvellous, is it not, Mrs. Cotton?"

"It may be," said the doctor cheerfully, "But it hasn't got to Kan Lu Pa. Cupping is a remedy that was old-fashioned when I was a boy—and none the worse for that."

Chang Chu-lien looked nervous whenever the doctor spoke, afraid that he might somehow be made ridiculous.

"Medicine's a little like magic, isn't it?" Daley said, looking at the strange spell of glittering glass and circles on Lena's chest.

"Should we not think of it as a science always, in order to avoid superstitions?" suggested Chang Chu-lien.

Daley thought that he said that to reassure himself. "He's so far away from understanding. He has to work all day at unknown enchantments, like a magician's slave in a fairy tale...."

When the cupping was over, they left Lena still looking quietly and intently at the window.

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Daley went first from the room and greeted the doctor with a cry as he came out after her. "Oh Doctor darling—look at your hat—how shall I break it to you?—look what Gregory's done...." The dog Gregory accompanied this utterance by beating a hard piebald tail upon the floor, as he lay on his stomach clasping a bitten hat between affectionate forepaws. "It's only a little hole—only three teeth wide," said Daley, rescuing the hat. "But it's no use pretending the hat will ever be quite the same again." She was bright red with laughter. "Oh Doctor, Doctor, how can I ever make up for this....?"

Chang Chu-lien giggled, sniffed, giggled, keeping his eyes on the doctor, ready to stop giggling at a second's notice if the doctor's face should show annoyance. Mrs. Lorne was very much distressed. Men's clothes, she reflected, were so expensive, and they never could be persuaded to buy them in the sales like any one else. Ought Lena to offer to make good the loss, since, if it hadn't been for her illness...?

"It's evident you're broken-hearted, Mrs. Cliff," said the doctor, smiling as he twiddled the wounded hat upon his finger. "So I won't press the matter as far as you're concerned. But I won't answer for Gregory, next time I catch him bending." He sniffed and hissed and rubbed his nose. Her laughter moved him, as he imagined "tragedy hanging over her."

Daley could not stop laughing. Only little things could make her laugh like that. She corked the hole in the hat with a full-blown red rose. "There's something about hats ..." she murmured brokenly. "Like when Clifford hung his hat on a spider."

"On a spider!" echoed Mrs. Lorne in a shocked voice.

"Yes, it was a big spider on the wall—looking like a nail.... He's *so* shortsighted...." She laughed immoderately and, all the time, was embarrassed to be so helpless, to feel her face so absurdly stretched. "Oh how silly I am.... It took me a long time to get over that spider...." She tried by means of a forced note of sober finality to deceive the little strong demon that possessed her into the belief that the joke was over. But speaking of Clifford and the charming disability of his eyes tossed her emotions about. "He makes *such* mistakes...." She remembered his wide bewildered eyes and burst into tears. She covered her face with her hands and rushed out into the garden. Neither Mrs. Lorne nor the doctor realised that the joke was over.

Mrs. Lorne was a little pained as she went back into Lena's room. Perhaps Lena was right, she thought; Daley must be rather heartless to laugh so hysterically at what was, after all, a real loss to the poor doctor and all came of her not controlling her pets. She sat beside Lena and presently they heard in the garden the curiously broken voice of Daley saying in surprise, "Why—Mr. Diamond's gone! Why—every one's gone!"

"I've not gone," said Lion's voice.

CHAPTER XI

Secure are the feet of the blessèd,

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And well may the blessed be brave,
With never a mountain but danger,
And never a chasm but the grave.
But the way of the sinner is strange—
To stray in the dark—to go poised
Along the thin brink of distress,
And to step, unaware, into joy.

Lion was surprised to hear Daley coming towards dinner singing in a small voice. He did not yet know that singing was, on the lips of Daley, not an expression of a mood at all. It was a sound as natural to her as breath, and she was only conscious of song when it was denied her. Her singing was like an indestructible glow on the surface of her presence, it was like the persisting enthusiasm on her vivid face. But Lion, as he heard her sing, was somehow dimly disappointed. Of course he said to himself, "By God—she's got pluck." Everything that Daley did or said seemed to him praiseworthy. If she listened to gay tunes on her Victrola he called her plucky; if she wept face downward on her bed, he thought of her as sensitive and tender. He fitted all her moods with tolerance and love. Even the fact that she often hurt and puzzled him did not wring a thought of blame from him. He simply called her 'whimsical' then. Yet he wished she would show some sign of knowing how immense—how selfless—how grown-up was his love for her. Her singing and her laughter seemed to underrate the solemnity of his love. She underrated her own glory, he thought, when she sang in the face of sorrow, or wept with unworthy friends, or when her great heart accepted petty consolations. Only this evening she had offered tears on the Victrola's altar—wasted tears in a puppy's fur.

There were about five chicken rissoles and six tartlets wasted because Clifford did not come in to dinner. Clifford always ate everything by fives and sixes, and his presence or absence at a meal could in no sense be imperceptible to a housewife.

Daley said, "Where *can* he be?" about seven times during dinner. Lion said patiently at intervals, "No doubt we shall hear presently."

Old Mrs. Cotton, Daley and Lion wandered among their thoughts as they ate. Each was in a castle of isolation. The differing ghost of Clifford was in all three castles. Daley's was the only castle that occasionally flew a little flag of talk.

"What *can* have kept Clifford from his dinner? Mother Cotton dear, when did you see him last?"

Old Mrs. Cotton was still thinking of the music. Seven years ago it had drawn her out into an English garden to find a changeling—an unknown son, in her known son's body. And today it had called her again, and she had started in pursuit. But her seven added years had made leaden her feet; she had fumbled and stumbled on one of her sticks; bending to grasp it again had been hard slow work. How

dreadful to be too old to run after the fairies! ... Reaching the garden at last, she had found that the music had dwindled to a thrilled silence, as laughter fades to a smile.

"Culliffudde?" she said harshly. "Culliffudde will never come back."

"What do you mean, darling? Now don't go getting ideas into your head about Clifford."

"He's gone ... he's gone.... He's gone with the music.... No one knows where mu-husic goes. No one will ever know where Culliffudde's gone...."

"Nonsense, dear Mother Cotton. Where could he go? There's no bad men in Kan Lu Pa."

"Eh no—but there's music...." Malice awoke in her old distressed face. "You ought to be glad of one thing, Daley. You'll be the heroine of a newspaper co-holumn at last. A rippowater will come—"

"A what?" cried Lion, whose nerves were taut for new mysteries.

"A reporter will come," said old Mrs. Cotton, keeping the destructive shake out of her voice with a great effort, "from America—where all reporters come from ... and I shall say, 'Culliffudde was my o-ho-honly son—the yapple of my yeye-yeye.' I shall say, 'Culliffudde and his wife were soul-mates—hok—but unhappily cheildless....' I shall say, 'I longed to hold my son's ch-hubby cheild with sunny cyurls complete on my knee before I di-hied—but God knows be-hest....' I shall talk of being a curipple and of missing my son's strong arm.... I shall give the reporter Daley's photograph—the one with the do-hoggie—"

"In my blue three-piece suit," murmured Daley, vaguely pleased. "It's a wunnerfully becoming one, that. Too bad it makes my feet look so big."

"—which I shall say is her fa-haithfull little chum. And if I leave out a few of the literary expressions you admire, Daley—heart-emptiness—or child-bride from across the seas ... the excellent young man will no doubt supply them all...." She leaned further and further forward and stuck out her chin, grinning rigidly at Daley and Lion. "Hak—hak—hak—" she laughed. "You'll like that, Daley.... Even if Culliffudde never comes back, you'll enjoy being the wife of a missing ge-hentleman in the newspapers. I shall like it too. I shall laugh ... and laugh...."

"Well well, I'm glad it amuses you," murmured Lion, shocked. "But I must say I don't see the joke myself."

Daley was thinking of "missing gentleman." "Actually he would be tickled to death," she thought, "to be called that." She heard his unforgotten voice in her heart—"You know, Daley, it's *too* tiresome—I find I haven't the instincts of a gentleman—I really haven't. I honestly liked that yellow tie with the green crosses on it, but Baker said, 'My God, Cotton, that tie gives me a pain in the pit of my stomach'—so of course I said I was wearing it for a bet. But what makes me nervous is that I might do it again any minute ... tomorrow it might be my shoelaces that give people stomachache, and the next day my way of eating Worcester Sauce ... and the bet excuse'll soon wear thin. Oh, I do wish I could look like a gentleman...." Daley, in the Ridley tradition, had said, "You look like a *man*, dearest, and that's ever so much better than looking like a gentleman." "Oh anybody can look like a man." Clifford had sighed.

"Mother Cotton dear," said Daley, "if you know anything I don't know about where Clifford is—I beg of you to tell me."

"Culliffudde was a changeling," said old Mrs. Cotton with unusual strength and rapidity. "How could a changeling go on living—in this *American* air? How could any ear tuned to the music of the fairies listen for ever to the creaking of *American* machi-hines? Oh you *American*—how many songs of fairies and birds—how many sounds of coming and go-hoing—how many lovely silences—have been drowned by the voice of your wax and tin consoler? You sit inside your cheap walls of noise and never hear the music outside.... You nearly drew the changeling in—*American*—but he fled in time...."

Daley stood up. "Oh, be done, Mother Cotton, with your railing at my America. You can't change me—you can't bewitch me. I'm American and I don't want to be changed. I may be a part of a machine—that's what I want to be—part of a machine called America. That's what makes Americans different—that's what we value—being a part of something great and good—not each a little separate despairing queer thing, like you miserable creatures of the old world. I *want* to think the same thoughts as millions of Americans—because their thoughts are safe and good. I don't *want* to sit apart and sneer. If a machine's working for good, it doesn't matter if some of the parts are ridiculous—they're part of a good whole.... Away from my America I'm only a broken part and mebbe only the ridiculousness shows—but let me go home—let me join the rest—and I'm strong—I'm safe—I'm a little bit of God...."

"Hak—hak—hak—" croaked old Mrs. Cotton.

Daley's eyes filled with tears. She went to the window. The evening still held a kind of secret thought of daylight.

"I'm glad of that, at least," she thought. "I just can't bear for today to go without comfort coming." Her eyes were precariously comforted by a streak of lemon-coloured light above the dark mountains. Her eyes treasured that record of surviving day. "I can hear the puppies whining," she said to Lion without turning her head. "Shall we go and make Josephine feed them? She forgets. She's such a wunnerfully modern mother." Her voice broke into a small nervous laugh.

Lion followed her as she went along the terrace whistling for Josephine. With a scattering noise Josephine shot towards them out of the shadows, but she refused to go into the kennel. "They don't need it, mum," Daley murmured for her. "They're full up. They're tight. They'll burst."

"But they're crying for it, my One," said Daley. "There's direct perjury on one side or the other...." She pushed the resisting Josephine into the kennel and bent down to look in. The puppies clustered about their mother like four fat bees round a flower that has opened tardily. Each puppy imagined that its neighbour had secured a more delicious or fruitful teat. There was a constant restless exchange, accompanied by mewings, and by corklike poppings of hungry lips being forcibly detached from the source of supply. Josephine did not interfere. She tacitly admitted now that she had been lying—that she had been disgracefully late for her appointment with her puppies. She lay on her side, smelling a dead leaf dreamily, and only sighed when the sharp grasping claws of the puppies scratched her teats.

Lion looked on, feeling most tender. The sight seemed to him mystically Canadian....

When it was over, Lion said, "Let's go in and talk by the fire. It's just chilly enough now for a fire."

Daley sat rather rigidly before the fire. Her knuckles were pressed to her lips, as though to keep her mouth steady, and it was evident that her little dispute with Josephine had had only a surface importance—had been, indeed, almost automatic.

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Old Mrs. Cotton, humming and croaking in an undertone, sat in the far corner, absorbed in tracing the pattern of the wallpaper with a futile shaking finger.

Daley said to Lion in a low voice, "I always used to feel so harmless.... I didn't know what it was—to feel offensive—before I came into this family. You know, when I was young, *American* was another word for good and glorious to me.... I used to think—" she giggled a little hysterically—"that every one would like to be American if they could. But everything that I thought was good and serious can be sneered at, it seems...."

She knew as she spoke that Lion would assure her that she could never offend—never seem foolish. He did not fail her, though he did not say much. He said, "Oh Daley, my dear, my dear..." and, sitting at her feet, leaned his head against her knee. Whatever had happened and whatever was going to happen, he felt himself a man at last, and nearer to Daley at this moment than he had ever been before. He was drugged by the warm stationary moment. He half shut his eyes; his thoughts stood quite still. Two dogs, Cowslip and Gregory, were asleep on the hearthrug, and it seemed that their unknown dreams and quiet breathing induced a kind of humming dream in the air of the room. Lion could hear the tense light surrenders of the burning log, and occasionally the sudden drowsy volubility of a half-aroused bird in the pomegranate outside. And presently Daley began to talk. She could not resist the luxury of talking about her sadness to a young man who loved her. This is a luxury reserved for childlike women loved by childlike men. It is the sunny side of sorrow. Unsatisfied love between cynics is a much more difficult and stark affair.

Both Daley and Lion had an hour of real melancholy enjoyment. Daley, satisfying her craving for compensating appreciation, found at first no need for tears. And Lion paid to her calmness his obtuse masculine tribute. "She's too plucky; it would be better for her if she could cry...." "But even now," said Daley quietly, "I love him as much as ever. All that's happened doesn't somehow make any difference to that." Lion thought, "She's loyal, she's as loyal as a—man." And somehow he did not change his mind when she went on to talk of the disappointments of life with Clifford. She was groping for a means to heal herself of her humiliation; recovery and admiration were as necessary as air to her for the moment. Lion's devotion was like a window opened before one suffocating for air. But she had to shut her eyes so that she might not see that it was "only poor darling Lion."

"He wasn't ever pleased with anything little.... He didn't know how to clap his hands and say—'Oh splendid—let's do that!'—He was enthusiastic in his way, but he didn't ever accept or share other people's little offerings of enthusiasm—especially mine. When I was happy, he told me to 'stop prattling,' Yet Mr. Diamond once said that when I was gay I was 'a wit by mistake.' Clifford generally interrupted me when I began to speak, to show that he didn't think anything I could say worth leaving a silence for——" (Lion thought, "The damn cad—the damn cad——") "He was always impatient of my—way of being nice to people; his impatience made me feel quite awkward about it sometimes, made me feel like I was showing off.... But I could forgive him a million snubs because he seems to me so grand, so clear, so real.... There never was any doubt in my real mind that it is better to have a few large natural reasonable thoughts than to have thousands of little wonderings jumping about in your mind. All the prattle he snubbed to death wasn't really worth saying—like treading out round a camp fire the little pretty flames that wouldn't really help to cook anything." She could see the picture in her words—the big foot crushing the small gay flames, the darkening of the air, the knots and threads of fading smoke like wreaths on the graves of the little flames. "He's too big to understand womanliness, or the frills of

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love. Love only means one thing to him, really; it never before now meant anything so silly as wisdom. That's what breaks my heart about his love for Lena—what is her wisdom to him, if she has any? She's so thin and sneering and worried—not fit for love at all. There's no nature in her at all—and he doesn't allow anything in love but nature... It must be a madness in him. It can't last—it can't last. He must want me again soon.... He wanted me so much at first. Truly, Lion, before we were married—and at Dieppe, on our honeymoon—he wasn't a bit scornful of me. Sometimes it seems to me, looking back, as if I married a different man from the man I fell in love with. In the early days he was interested in what I said—even if it was only nonsense. He never told me to stop that row, when I hummed a song. He changed quite suddenly, the day after we came back from our honeymoon. I expect one of us has told you about that crazy argument about whether snapdragons have teeth... It was the last nonsense we ever shared, so I can't help remembering it. All later nonsenses were nonsenses for *one*.... All that breakfast-time we argued, and after breakfast he went out to look into the mouth of a snapdragon. And now sometimes I think perhaps his mother was right—perhaps he never came back—the Clifford I married never came back. For when he came in from the garden—oh, it was as if he was a stranger.... Sometimes I think he had a touch of the sun—sometimes I think, no, it was his mother's queer influence—(we only arrived at her house the evening before that. We've never got away from her since.) A doctor once told me that the effects of a shock might be deferred and some little unconscious reminder might give a twist to the mind.... Perhaps it was that. But oh, perhaps it's true he was a changeling ... perhaps his heart was spirited away out of his body that day.... I don't know.... I don't know.... We don't have such things in America. That's why I want to go back to America and not know of such things any more...."

Of course it's wrong of me to say we never shared things again—we did—we often laughed—we often loved each other. I couldn't have lived without. I just *have* to laugh.... And I've loved him faithfully and—though he never truly loved me after that day, I think—he never loved another woman. I oughtn't to have expected any more, I guess. All husbands have to get a little scornful, after their honeymoons are over.... Do you know, I once wrote to the Love Mentor in the *Woman's Helpful Friend*. I wrote over the name *Lonesome* ... and I asked how it was that men changed from lovers into husbands—quite suddenly—just in an hour.... The answer was very comforting. It began, *Poor little lonesome bride*—but it was very cheering after that—said that first love, if genuine, did not die but was changed into a deeper less passionate feeling which was just as wunnerful and God-given as the other—only not so showy.... So I believed that and didn't mind snubs and just went on loving him—and now—look what's happened—he's left me—he's left me....

And at once she longed for him so unbearably that she was able to paint his presence on the air. Even the broken chequered pattern of his tweed coat was there to wound her; she saw his thick ankles in khaki woollen socks, his tie which always looked as if it had been too much fingered in the tying, his big head and the dappled look of his neck, his eager mouth, slightly open, waiting for a chance to interrupt some one else's talk. She saw the creases of surprise above his eyes and the thick dark eyelashes that, alone in that prosaic face, even though they were behind glasses, gave to his expression the faint hint of a dream. "He lives in my eyes," thought Daley. "He can't—he can't die from behind my eyes...."

She had a picture in her eyes—not a prophecy—not a hope—not even a thought—but an indelible and foolish picture of herself in the arms of a duplicate Clifford—an authentic and exact Clifford, but one who had never forsaken her. "Oh, Clifford," she heard herself crying on this other Clifford's breast.

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"Wasn't it cruel of him? Wasn't it unfair? Did I ever deserve it? Oh Clifford—I was so terribly unhappy—comfort me—comfort me—let me forget it now." With a feeling of shock she remembered again that there was only one Clifford—and that he had forsaken her. Must she then wring comfort from the vision of an imperfect but repentant Clifford? This old world was so dangerous—was it possible that his desertion had been a fantastic accident? Had he broken her heart, as he might have broken her arm, by mistake, not realising his own rough strength? Her broken heart, in that case, would be healed tonight. He would surely come home. She imagined him far away, thinking frantically of her. She lighted a flare of illuminating thoughts in his mind, she put bewildered words between his lips—"Oh what have I done to my mate ... my little lonesome bride? What possessed me—what possessed me—to break my Daley's heart?" She saw him aghast, turning suddenly on a remote moonlit trail, running on stumbling feet—running home....

She looked quickly out of the window. The moonlight was clear, and the uneven paving-stones of the garden path lay like sheets of satin between dark velvet cushions. A sort of democracy of pallor had overtaken the flowers. Varied snapdragons, roses washed with wine, the bright rigid irises and the open young leaves of the violets shared a common ghostly neutrality of colour. The continuous humble murmur of the cicadas and the frogs was like a grass of sound.

And suddenly Daley realised that the night had come now. Suddenly she was terrified because she had lost the safe day. "While the day lasted I could keep on forgetting and hoping," she thought. "Every little beetle and blowing leaf was a comfort. Things were real by day—nearly American by day...." The day that should have stayed, that should have waited to redeem its extravagances—was gone, unshriven of its sins. Nobody but a fairy could come home by night....

It seemed to her suddenly as if there had been no daylight—no innocent American day-light—for seven years—that the sun had been blind, since it had never seen the real Clifford come home out of that bright humming garden seven years ago. This false alien China sun had been haunted always by the sliding secret moon. It seemed to Daley that she was the widow of a man who died seven years ago—that she had been living in sin with a fairy.

She watched the night in horror. The moon was behind the house. The shadow of the house cut the garden in two. The garden chairs, the kennel and the little clipped bushes on the terrace were like the audience holding its breath in the dark—watching in the dark for something queer to happen on the bright stage of moonlight beyond. Daley heard the puppies mewling like frightened babies in the silence, and automatically she murmured, "My nimbles—be calm, my nimbles...." The moonlight shone full on the dewy grey turf beyond the shadow of the house, on the little minarets of the snapdragons and hollyhocks, on the close abrupt edge of the bamboo grove. But it could not light the grove. A few stems of bamboos were singled out by the defeated moon, and shone against the shadow, like the stripes of a tiger.

In the corner by the window, old Mrs. Cotton, huddled and leering, drew shaky designs in the air with a crooked finger.

"Oh why is tonight so terrible?" cried Daley. "So unanswering.... That's what it is—that's what's so cruel about these old worlds, about these old fairies—you call and they don't answer.... In my America we all think alike—we know the answers to each other's calls—we don't let people cry out into stony silences.... When people call for help, my America's air is full of kind voices answering ... coming nearer

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... coming to help. But here—oh, what is it—hidden behind that sky, among those trees, under those flowers, in the cold hearts of people one loved? You can call and call—and no one answers."

"Call me and I'll answer," said Lion, kneeling upright to face her ardently.

"But it isn't you I want, Lion, it isn't you I want. It isn't you who can save me. It's Clifford I want—oh Clifford, Clifford, Clifford—save me—save me from tonight...."

Lion stood up violently as she thus blasphemed against his devotion, turning his sharp beautiful dream against his own breast, profaning the sacred appeal with a worthless name. He opened his mouth to speak in a loud voice of agony. He wanted to fill the air with a great desperate protest—to call down immortal curses on his wasted sacrifice—to be impressive at last, to be immense and terrible at last. But his tameness stopped his mouth. Even despair could not loose him from his bonds of tameness. He went out of the room and shut the door quite gently.

Daley did not call him back. She listened for the answering call of Clifford—of that Clifford, who, long ago, had run out into the garden and never come back. She listened for the faint far-off answer of Clifford coming back now, across seven years.

There was no sound.

"Look how I'm spoilt," she said in a low voice. "Look how far I am from America. No answer. No answer. I'm at the mercy of things that have no voice."

She remembered vaguely her old safety. She had never known herself, but at least she had always felt safe. She had been full of life, healthy, ignorant and humble. Her brains had scarcely furnished her mind at all—and yet she had a vividly lighted mind. A springtime breeze had blown innocent visions through the bright rooms of her mind. She had been hostess in her own halls, she had smiled on guests and visions alike. Nothing inside the house of her mind had ever seemed to her very seriously wrong—not because she had searched and found everything perfect, but because she had never searched at all. Home had been home—familiar but never criticised, imperfect but safe; cold winds might blow outside, might even whistle through doors left ajar, but the house of her mind had remained home still, a place where she had never been puzzled or lost. Until now she had never guessed that the possessing soul might lose its way in its own domain.

She sat down by the table. The silver inkstand, the Riddleys' wedding present, stood on the table, and across its fortifying glitter she looked with fear at the bent trembling shoulders of old Mrs. Cotton in the far corner. She could hear the old woman's stuttering and croaking going on like a satanic spell. "I must drown spells," thought Daley. And she turned to her Victrola. With the first note of the 'Shepherds' Dance' a new vision entered her sight. She saw a great ship, at night, noisy with the agitation of departure. *Going home.... Going home.... Americans going home.* ... It was like a song in the living air that blew through the rigging of the ship. The mountains beyond the ship were grey with dawn. Hard iron on the wharf clanked against hard iron; iron noises were thrown like rebounding balls against the echoing mountains. On the ship's decks, men swinging lanterns crossed and recrossed the square shadows that were so unlike the feathered and shifting shadows of the grove. Men with lanterns always look like rescuers. Behind the sea the little beginning of day, strong with future, fought against the dangerous old night. "This ship sails into the day. It's a very short journey after all—from the dark into the day...." The dream dawn devoured the dream sky. The sky was suddenly striped with sunlight. The

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unseen sun was throwing spears before it. The grey sea was green now. There were birds on the mountains instead of fairies. A splinter of sun showed above the sea. A ray ran from it through the spidery rigging of the ship. The ship moved. Going home ... going home.

CHAPTER XII

I am so near to seeing—and yet I am blind.

So near, so near to dreaming—and yet mustwake.

To be locked from the light of the stars is peace, and kinder

It is to be saved from dreams than to be forsaken.

Let not the night bring love, for the night's a traitor,

Let me not hear love's far and hesitant crying,

For, though he cry no more, I wait ... I wait....

I am so near to living—and I must die.

Mrs. Lorne had left Lena two hours before. She had found great difficulty in getting away. "And I'll put the barley water quite close to you here, dearie. Look where it is ... on this little wee table. You've only to stretch out your little handie to take it and you won't be lonely kind Mrs. Cotton bringing her camp bed in here later though I'm sure my girlie's going to sleep snug and restfully all of a gentle perspiration and dream of pretty flowers and sheep jumping over a stile, and the barley water—look, dearie, look where I've put the barley water."

"I've looked."

"Yes, that's it. That's the barley water. You've only to stretch out your little handie and take it if you feel the wee-est bittie thirsty. Now tell me, dearie, d'you think you'll feel the window like that?—air but not too much air as dear old Doctor Wilson used to say and what about the blinds—up or down?"

"Up," said Lena. "Down. It doesn't matter a damn. You can't keep the mountains out either way."

Mrs. Lorne sighed. But after a moment she said, "May auntie kiss her girlie...? Lena dearie ... couldn't you soften your heart a little—think it's mother kissing you ... oh my dearie—couldn't you soften your heart a little and let gentleness and love come in ...?"

Lena allowed her hard unhappy face to be kissed. One of her aunt's tears remained on Lena's cheek.

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"Well," she thought, when she was alone, "Clifford has run away too. Clifford has run away from me too. Death was kinder to him than Lena. It isn't natural to love Lena. Death is more natural than to love Lena. Lena ... Lena ... Lena...." She whispered her own name to herself over and over again.

"Hateful Lena. Loveless Lena. Lena who had nothing but a name. Lena who had no body. Lena who had no soul. Lena who was less desired than death...." She would have cried out at the sound of her own name spoken aloud; she could only whisper it fearfully, as one might whisper the name of a ghost.

She heard Daley go to her room next door to prepare herself for dinner. The doors were open. Lena could hear Daley singing a little slow song in an undertone.

There was a rich Josephine in China did dwell, She had four little puppykins and she loved them well. Sing Josephine—sing Josephine—sing Josephine so fair, Sing Josephine—sing Josephine—sing Josephine so fair.

The song was apparently sung in absence of mind, for this verse was sung about eight times, and the plot, such as it was, remained undeveloped. A slight swishing noise could be heard, and this was the sound of Josephine's tail wagging against the boards in appreciation of the theme of the song. After the song was over Josephine talked for a while, though of course Lena thought the voice was Daley's. The words, uttered in the compressed squeak consecrated to Josephine, were mostly inaudible in the next room, though sometimes Lena could hear such remarks as, "Cowslip doesn't understand a highstrung dog like me, mum, he's never *suffered*," or, "Oh mum, *I* love you anyway—and all the puppies love you—I've seen to that." To which Daley in a small normal voice returned such strange words as, "My smutriculator ... my bird in the hand ... my maybug from Darkest Africa...." To all this Lena listened in moody surprise. Presently the voices stopped, and Lena heard Daley sigh twice and then go along the passage to the diningroom, still humming the song about Josephine.

Lena sat up in bed. She put her trembling bare feet out on to the carpet and walked across the room, wavering a little weakly. She was so light and thin that she made no sound. She stood at the open window. It was a threefold window, a triptych with the moonlit grove painted upon it. A bowl of pale roses, which looked white in the dim light, stood on the window seat and increased the likeness to an altar. Lena caught the altar suggestion, though, when she stood at the middle window with her outstretched arms against the window frame, she did not know that she furnished the altar with a crucifix. She remembered her aunt's reference to the angels of God walking on the mountains, and she shivered. The painted grove, the painted mountains, were as meaningless as painted angels. She thought she could see sneering gargoyles carved in the rough elaborate pinnacles and domes of the trees and mountains that pierced the moonlight. Her lover had broken away through the trees as a man might break through death, and he would never come back. Only the cold angels of God, waiting on the mountains, might expect him now.

She gave a convulsive start which almost threw her backwards from the window seat, as she realised that there was some one quite close to her, looking in from the garden. The moonlight caught the uneven planes of the large bony face of Mr. Lorne.

"I'm afraid I startled you," he said in a cold voice. "I was coming to speak with you. I have not told the Cottons that I am here."

Lena looked at him feverishly and unsteadily but made no answer.

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"You are ill, I know," said Mr. Lorne awkwardly. "But I must speak with you. If you will listen to me patiently for a moment, I will stand here outside the window and say what I have to say."

Lena huddled herself in her shawl on the window seat and turned her face away from him.

"You will think I have no right to be here," said Mr. Lorne. "But I have really. My wife told me that you were in pain and sorrow and that you were not able to turn to God. That alone gives a messenger of God a right to come."

Lena thought, "I knew it. The cold intruding angels of God." She said aloud in a weak sneering voice, "Why penalise good honest pain and sorrow? What business has God to send messengers to me? Messages from far off are always irrelevant. God hasn't touched my life at all—nothing has—not life nor death nor magic.... God doesn't know my life."

"I have no doubt your life has been extremely wicked. So has every life. But life cannot be lived far off from God. You see, God *is* life."

"I tell you, I know nothing about life. I am not alive. I am neither living nor dead. I am not wicked as you think. To be wicked you have to be alive."

"Yes, you are right. Not to be alive, not to let life in, is to accept corruption—it is worse than wickedness. Yes, that is the One Sin. But you—you admit pain and love and longing—there are tears in your eyes at this moment—how can you say you are not alive?"

Lena answered in a smothered voice, "I was born diminished and denied. My agony and my love are not the agony and the love of a living body and soul. Go away, messenger of God, you can't argue a minus into a plus...."

"I didn't come to argue," said Mr. Lorne. "I know nothing to argue about. Argument has no voice at all. How could argument take away your sorrow?"

"I want nothing taken away. I want something given." After a moment she began to cry. "Oh, I want *glory* given to me—even a minute's *glory*...."

Mr. Lorne moved, rustling against the creeper outside. "Be still, poor creature, be still. Glory is yours. You inherit glory. You are made of glory. You breathe glory. What is this air but glory? What are those stars but glory? What are all these songs of little creatures but glory? What is your burning consciousness—what are your tears—but glory? Call it glory—call it magic—call it just life if you like. I call it God. Without glory you couldn't cry for glory. What are you, apart from this glory? Nothing but dust. What is it that beats and cries and loves and seeks within you? You may have been starved of common pleasure—you can't be starved of glory. Deny glory—deny God—deny life—and what do you leave yourself? Nothing but dust."

"Nothing but dust," agreed Lena.

"But there is glory in the dust. A flame of glory in a pillar of dust."

"Go away—go away—don't bother me," cried Lena, suddenly weakly furious. "I won't be comforted. I won't be hypnotised——" Then she checked herself and laughed. "That's Clifford's old magic again."

"Call it what you like," said Mr. Lorne. "But just hold yourself high for a moment and listen. Listen."

For a few seconds Lena surrendered and listened. Certainly the night was alive. Everything breathed, everything moved, everything spoke; a million unknown wild hearts beat on in the dark. All the stranger stars followed glory through the sky. The mountains were enclosed in a sheath of humble and brilliant immortality. Everywhere among the hidden trees, life fell like a rain, and hallowed the breathing earth.

"It is as though we were swimming in a sea of life," said Mr. Lorne. "There is only one sin and that is to let go and sink—to accept death and weakness and corruption and indolence—to sink from the light of the sun and close our eyes to God—to take into our mouths the evil taste of the depths below the surface of glory...."

And at that moment, Lena remembered to sneer again. "Ff-ff," she laughed, and she thought, "I won't be hypnotised. Salvation's a quack drug. I can't be cured of being Lena." She forced the interview into a ridiculous light. "Ff-ff—so damn virginal. Perfect gentleman and lady with eyes mutually averted. Duel of high ethics at a safe range of fifteen feet ... chaste begetting of a soul...." And she did not speak again. She looked blankly at a million stars and whispered her own name again and again to herself. "Lena—Lena—Lena—who lived without being alive...."

Mr. Lorne stood in silence for a long time. He had not heard her laugh, and her sneering distraught face was in shadow. Yet it was not with a feeling of accomplishment that he went away at last.

Outside the Cottons' gate, his wife was waiting for him. She put her hand through his arm. They were the same height. They walked away close together, throwing a square single shadow in front of them in the moonlight. Their small blunt shoes, tramping in unison, trod on the retreating shadow, and on all the dark shadows scrawled by the trees upon the ground.

Some people see the moonlight as a dream and the shadows in the night as snares, but Mrs. Lorne dreamed no dreams and feared no snares. She did not really see with her eyes at all. The mountains and the skies were only the gross clothing of God, after all, and she called them "pretty scenery."

"I tried to catch you up, Edgar dearie, because I thought—Oh dear, by rights I ought to have told Edgar all about what is on Lena's mind, so as to help you to choose healing words, though I'm sure you left her strengthened in spite of not really knowing what it was all about. But you walked so fast, I couldn't. I should have told you before you set out that Lena told me that she and Mr. Cotton are entertaining sinful thoughts about each other, and that is what makes her so unhappy though of course we should not judge others or betray their confidence except when justified as in this case. Circumstances alter cases and Mr. Cotton is not a very temperate man and perhaps not many moral advantages in upbringing, for if one can ever say that a fellow-sinner has an evil mind, I must say I think old Mrs. Cotton is so. Oh. When I think of what she said—and how she said it, though possibly I can't help thinking a little truth in it. But Lena is my sister's girlie and I know you will feel just as I do about it, Edgar, more in sorrow than in anger, being always the woman that pays."

"She seemed to be grieving," said Mr. Lorne, "more over a lost love than a found love."

"Perhaps you opened her eyes to a consciousness of sin and made her resolve to lead a better life though indeed any one less inclined to brazen things out than Lena I never did see."

"She has let go," said Mr. Lorne. "That is her sin and she is very conscious of it. She has allowed herself to live less finely—less tensely than she could have lived. Not to exert the whole strong power of life is the only sin, really—it embraces all sins. To accept the whole of life is not an easy thing. That poor creature has been seeking an easy way into life, just as drugs are sought by some as an easy way into pleasure. Glory is the breath of life—she knows that, but she does not know that there is—there must be—austerity in glory. Since glory is only one of the names of God."

He walked along, looking firmly at the ground, kicking at his shadow.

"If we remember our heritage of austere glory, the choice between the body and soul is not necessary. There is no choice. Both can be gloriously served."

"You can't serve two masters, dearie," Mrs. Lorne corrected him gently. "You remember—great was the fall thereof and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." She thought, "That's what I was doing—serving two masters, when I set too much store by my Bertie ... and there *was* weeping...."

"There are no two masters," insisted Mr. Lorne. "Body and soul are one—together they make life, as the torch and the flame are one, and together make light in dark places. But the torch has to be held high by a strong hand...."

"Constance," he cried suddenly. "We *have* been human—we *have* accepted all life—haven't we—haven't we? I have begotten children...."

Mrs. Lorne could only hope that no one could overhear him. He had these moods, almost amounting to a cross, moods which in another man would be really nothing less than coarse. And suddenly, at this inopportune moment, her lifelong habit of seeing nothing was broken. She was suddenly sure that some one was listening—some one besides the angels. How unlucky if a listener should overhear Edgar in this unfortunate mood. Of course the Bible talked about begetting children—dear little things—but the Bible said they were born in sin—begotten in sin—which probably meant that it was coarse to talk about birth or begetting. One should leave that to the Bible, which seemed to be able to purify the coarsest ideas. And Edgar had a very pure mind too, whatever he might say. Angels, she hoped, would remember this, but other listeners might misunderstand. She saw the moonlight with opened eyes, and did not like it at all. She could not rid her mind of the idea that there were leering dancing crowds among the bamboos. She could almost hear the sound of laughter in the pomegranate orchard. She could not see the little red stars of pomegranate blossom, but she half-saw a scurry, as of mocking eavesdroppers, escaping from the bright orchard into the dark grove. Certainly not angels.

Mr. Lorne thought about the first time he saw Constance in her nightgown.

"It is not true," he said loudly, "that bodies are only seducers of the virgin soul. It is not true that souls are always ravished virgins and bodies always legalised seducers. Marriage between the body and soul is honourable, in the sight of God. And we have achieved it, Constance, haven't we—haven't we?"

Mrs. Lorne withdrew her hand from his arm. Two separate oblong shadows walked in front of them now.

CHAPTER XIII

Though you be mighty,
Lover, to win your dear,
Yet shun fighting
Against fairy spears,
Seeing no bannered delight,
No challenge hearing.

Midsummer nights
Are dangerously starry,
And the far-sighted
Must travel far.

Shut your heart's eyes,
Lover, lest your heart see
The fine-spun surprises
Of færie.

So may you wisely
Escape freedom;
So may you truly cry
To your love, kneeling,
Dear, I have sacrificed
A thousand worlds for thee.

Lion stood at the Cottons' front door looking darkly at the moon. He felt finally dismissed by Daley's cry to the absent Clifford; no reproach, he thought, could have been more cruelly final. Very well then—he would leave her to her ineffectual comforters—her husband who was no husband and her music which was no music. However, he did not leave. He stood on her doorstep, waiting for her to call him back.

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Mr. Diamond, still doggedly followed by Milady, Edna, the doctor and Chang Chu-lien, came up the garden path. Poor Mr. Diamond would have liked to walk quietly about Kan Lu Pa by himself, looking cool and sapient, elucidating the mystery of Clifford's behaviour and chivalrously protecting weak women from a knowledge of the process. But he could not get rid of his superfluous supporters. He looked quite hot now, having tried for so long to be gentlemanly under such difficulties.

"Any news?" he asked Lion, and Lion replied, "No, I was going to ask you the same thing." The tiresomeness of women, and man's common wish to be allowed to appear clever drew Lion and Mr. Diamond together at last.

"You ladies ought to be in bed," said Mr. Diamond, but without much hope. "I am deep-ply grateful for your assistance. Most deep-p-ply. But ladies mustn't miss their beauty sleep—must they, Doctor? Certainly not. Certainly not."

"Certainly not," he repeated a little forlornly, after a pause during which Milady and Edna made no move.

The far off sound of Daley's gramophone was like a faint stain on the clear air. "How ubiquitous women are," thought Mr. Diamond plaintively. They all jumped as Liu Sao-shing appeared at the garden gate.

"Good evening. Is Mr. Cotton at his home?" asked Liu Sao-shing as he came up the path.

"No."

"Then where is he, if you please?"

"Where indeed?" sighed Mr. Diamond.

"If you can tell us that, laddie," said Milady, "you win the bag of bulls-eyes."

"He is not in prison cell?" said Liu Sao-shing.

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Diamond. "Why should he be?"

"I say, why should he *not* be in prison cell?" said Liu Sao-shing. "If Chinese gentleman in Shanghai become intoxicated and walk about in beastly forgetting of decency, British policeman would immediately remove him to prison cell. Yet British drunken chap——"

"When did you last see Mr. Cotton?" interrupted Mr. Diamond.

"One hour and half ago," said Liu Saoshing. "He was laid down in tree-shade. I saw his head waving from small bushes. I had business matter to say to him concerning the roof over printing machine shed, so I said, 'Mr. Cotton please, a structure of light bamboo such as these structures upon my properties'——"

"But what did *he* say?" asked Mr. Diamond.

"I said, 'Mr. Cotton, such a structure is not intended for heavy foreign machine. Foreigners at own risks import'——"

"Yes, but didn't he make any reply?" asked Mr. Diamond.

"To first question he makes no reply," said Liu Sao-shing. "But when I talk of rain coming in upon machine, he spoke a very intoxicated answer, saying, 'Rain—yes—now you mention, I remember rain'..."

"That doesn't sound intoxicated," said Mr. Diamond, vicariously offended. "It simply sounds as if he'd been asleep. Was he lying on his back?"

"At first he had laid upon his back, but subsequently he sat bold up and I then see he is without clothes. He was severely intoxicated. He shout, 'What is this world? What is this trees? Where palaces? Where dancers?' or something like this and he then began to sing most boozy song. He sing strongly for a minute and subsequently he shuts up and says, 'Oh, song is fading away—oh, I am forgetting song,' and so he cry a little bit. I said, 'Mr. Cotton, I give you notice that I will not pay repairs to printing shed roof; it is matter for Mission and'—"

"Did he look ill or anything?"

"His face and breast all blooded with scratches. He looked without sense. He refused to undertake that Mission should repair roof, though I told him that last night's strong rain had already—"

"Please, Mr. Liu, keep to the matter in hand."

"My matters *are* matters in hand, Mr. Diamond. Chinese matters are equally in hand as foreign matters. Why should foreign persons always think—"

"Yes, I know—I know.... I'll see Mr. Lorne tomorrow about the mission press roof. But tell me now what happened to Mr. Cotton—how you left him."

"He shouted in big voice, 'Oh rain—oh cold wind—oh tears—oh darkness—' and many other such nouns, saying that he had recently visited country where rain was not customary—in this way evading matter of rain on press. I saw that he was intoxicated and I said, 'Mr. Cotton please, you are intoxicated.' I thought to myself privately, 'Justice shall at least be done sometimes,' so I went to police station and conducted Police-officer Ch'en to the place where Mr. Cotton was laid, saying, 'This drunken chap—in spite of British nationality—must be thrown in prison cell'—"

"What on earth were you thinking about?" shouted Mr. Diamond, becoming quite pink. "Don't you know that—"

"Yes, I know British persons in China are hiding behind unjust treaties to escape laws of country they populate. I know British persons say Chinese law has no rights to punish British criminals and drunks. But I am Chinese. I say British law has no rights to work vengeance on innocent Chinese patriots in Chinese territories. If British do so, Chinese also shall do so. I order Police-officer Ch'en to be patriotic and remove Mr. Cotton harmlessly to prison cell."

To be accurate, he had given Mr. Ch'en sixty-five cents for his patriotism.

"But it's an outrage!" exclaimed Mr. Diamond.

"Outrages are common in China in these modern days, in my opinions. If foreign police-officer can exercise judgement to murder Chinese patriotic student—shall not Police-officer Ch'en exercise judgement to suppress intoxicated and horrid spectacle? However, as affair turns out, Mr. Cotton did not necessitate."

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"Did not what?" gasped Mr. Diamond.

"Mr. Cotton was not present in the place where formerly I have been speaking with him. His subsequent whereabouts is unknown."

There was a pause, long enough for Daley's distant Victrola to play several bars of 'Poppies, Xylophone Solo.'

"I consider," said Mr. Diamond, "that you acted in an unreasonable and unneighbourly way—to call it by no harsher name. Not a doubt of that. Not a doubt. You deliberately—What's that?"

Tuning his ears to verify some reticent and hinted sound, he was shocked and revolted by a wild scream from Milady. She stood in the opening of the sweet-pea hedge, looking on to the lawn, and screamed and screamed with every breath. Only after the first two or three screams was it evident that she was laughing. The air was indecently torn by her yells of laughter. Her feet could be heard staggering and shuffling on the grass to the convulsions of her body. "Oh lawd—oh my lawd—oh gurls—oh my lawdy!"

Mr. Diamond listened anxiously to assure himself that Daley was not frightened by this clamour, but rather to his surprise, the sound of the gramophone droned and wavered on, if anything, a little louder, as if she had raised the lid of the machine to increase the noise and drown this wild intruding laughter.

Mr. Diamond pushed past the sweet-peas on to the lawn. Opposite to him stood Mr. Lorne without his coat. His shirt could now be seen to be no shirt but only a "front." The rest of his upper half was clothed in a neat Chinese singlet. The "front" leaned a little away from his panting breast, and was striped with bold blue stripes and decorated with a little false bow tie, buttoned, apparently, to the wearer's Adam's apple. The whole thing was an ingenious and thrifty contrivance of Mrs. Lorne's, designed to save washing rather than to meet the public eye.

Milady, doubled up with wild laughter, appeared to be bowing before him.

"What in the world does all this mean?" asked Mr. Diamond sharply. To Milady he added, "Oh please do be quiet." He was startled out of his politeness.

"There is no cause either for laughter or surprise," said Mr. Lorne, patting down the "front" without embarrassment. "We have found Clifford Cotton, naked in the forest. He is in a sort of trance. He has had a vision. He has been vouchsafed a revelation. I think he need no longer seek wisdom. He has sought it so faithfully all these years."

"What kind of vision? What do you mean?" asked Mr. Diamond.

"He says he has travelled golden ways and has seen shining faces. He says he has been made familiar with an unspeakable wisdom. He hardly seems the same man."

"But you also have been perhaps cracked and robbed?" asked the bewildered Chang Chulien. "Of garments? Of how many? One? Two?"

Mr. Lorne looked at him patiently, his chin lifted proudly above his little false tie. "I have been robbed of nothing," he said quietly. "Naturally I did my best to clothe the naked."

"Do be more clear. Please," said Mr. Diamond with a precarious restraint. "Tell me plainly where Cotton is now."

"I will begin at the beginning," said Mr. Lorne. "My wife and I heard his voice in the shadow of the grove as we were walking home along the path. He was repeating his own name—Christopher Clifford Cotton—Christopher Clifford Cotton. I called him and he said, 'Is that the voice of a man?' I went aside into the grove and found him kneeling upright by a mossy mound with a broken stone pillar on it—probably an old Chinese grave. It seemed to me that there was a curious light there—or rather that there had been a light which had now almost faded. Cotton said, 'They have left me behind,' and he shed some tears. I spoke to him soothingly, and presently he said, 'I have been the guest of shining hosts for a thousand years.' I asked him what he could mean. I reminded him that he had been talking with me as late as three o'clock this afternoon. He answered, 'Not I—I was far away. Alas, I have been born again.' I said, 'Cotton, you have had a vision. Have you seen God?' He said, 'Oh I dare say...but now I am born again—left to the mercy of strange men again—left alone among these damp leaves and in this cold air.' I wrapped him in my coat and scarf and my wife lent him her mackintosh. I said, 'Come home to your wife, Cotton, she is anxious about you, she is waiting for you.' But he answered, 'I am widowed, I am widowed now. I have been married to the Beautiful and the Wise.' 'Oh,' he said after a moment, holding out his hands to me, 'don't let me forget—teach me—teach me to remember....' I laid my hand upon his arm and promised that he and I together would try and keep his memory of this day holy.... But it is a heavy fall—from the high pastures of the blessed...."

"I cannot understand a word you say," said Mr. Diamond. "Where did you leave him? Why did you leave him? Why didn't you bring him straight home?"

"He was very much scratched—apparently by thorns," answered Mr. Lorne. "So, as we were then within a few yards of the Mission, my wife took him there to bathe his wounds and to lend him some more clothes, for he was cold. As soon as this is done, she will bring him home."

Mr. Diamond looked round him uneasily. The fantastic element in these stories and in the night disturbed him. It was like a snake in his garden of reasonable polite things; he could not get close to it, he could not lay hands on it, he could not dismiss it from his mind.

"We'd better not tell Daley anything of this," he said in an undertone to Lion, "till Clifford actually arrives and we know what kind of a state he is in. I must say I don't understand it. I simply don't understand it." But he spoke rather brightly to Milady and Edna. "Now we really mustn't keep you ladies any longer. The mystery is now happily cleared up and we men will just wait about a few minutes to hear Cotton's own story and then all go home to our well-deserved beds. I will get Mrs. Cotton's coolie to light you home. Hey, coo—"

"Not so fast, moosioo," said Milady. "This is the only battle murder or sudden death I've ever been a party to, and I've simply got to see it to its bitter end. You couldn't pry me off this property with a stick of dynamite, Mr. Diamond my lad, and that's a fact. Edna feels the same way about it—don't you Tubby? Besides we're as thirsty as pickled shrimps, and I've an idea that if we could get in to Mrs. Cotton's diningroom, I've a sharp enough nose to smell out a whiskey and soda all round.... What-you-say, boys and gurls?"

"Carried unanimously," said the doctor in a boisterous undertone. "But don't let's disturb poor little Mrs. Cliff till Cotton comes back. Let's leave the poor kid to play with her toy while she can—bless her...."

They all tiptoed in and sat down in the diningroom on chairs round the wall. Mr. Lorne alone stood, looking out of the window, watching for his wife and Clifford. Liu Saoshing said to Mr. Lorne in a hollow and rather hopeless voice, "Mr. Lorne please. I give you notice the roof over your mission printing machine in my shed must subsequently admit rain which spoils machine, very likely. Nevertheless it is not my matter—on contrary, it is your matter." But his fears were justified. Mr. Lorne made no reply.

There was a long silence, broken only by a stifled giggle from Milady whenever she caught Edna's eye after a glance at the neatly darned back of Mr. Lorne's singlet.

Silence in a group of people was always most repugnant to Mr. Diamond. There should be, he thought, something polite and pleasant to be said in any circumstances. But for the moment he could not find it. Of course he remarked at the very beginning, "It looks as if the rain has cleared away, doesn't it?" and Edna rather eagerly replied, "Yes it does, doesn't it—not a cloud in the sky." But even Mr. Diamond did not feel that this was very satisfactory. Silence made one look at people too closely, he felt. Nearly every one, when silence falls, is afflicted with some unpleasant form of fidgeting. Something must wag, if the tongue cannot. Lion, for instance, was picking at a little piece of rough skin on his palm. The doctor, unusually serious, was twisting his mouth with a gnawing movement; his eyes were fixed upon Milady's fat ankles in a glare of abstraction. Milady clinked her long pointed nails upon her glass of whiskey, playing some unknown tune to herself with an irritating persistence. Edna folded and refolded a rather dirty pocket handkerchief very meticulously upon her knee. Mr. Lorne's lips moved. Chang Chu-lien looked as though his enthusiasm had been suddenly deflated. He was like the drummer in an orchestra, whose energy has all been concentrated on the two *ponks* which the score demands as his only contribution to a symphony. He has twiddled the drum-keys to perfection, shifted his seat, blown his nose, breathed on his drumstick, swept away unconsidered *ponkless* pages of the score, pinned a fierce eye on the conductor as the moment approached—and then—*ponk—ponk*—two seconds of self-expression and his show is over. The music leaves him behind; he sits flaccid, blind to the further frenzies of the conductor; he listens no more to the silly violins and bassoons bleating and mooing on.

Chang Chu-lien, though despondent, was quite still. He and Liu Sao-shing alone let their hands and faces rest in sad dignity.

"The most profoundly reasonable people on earth—the Chinese," thought Mr. Diamond, looking at their quiet faces. "Nothing can tempt them away from reason—a reason so detached from all our fancy considerations of unselfishness and mystic picturesqueness and what not—that it seems almost like nonsense to us...." He thought of Chinese with a sense of escape from a troublesome fantastic day. He thought of Chinese peasants watching with a singlehearted intensity foreign picnickers eating hardboiled eggs; he thought of the crumpled sensible cheerful faces of trousered farm women who, at seven and twenty, had borne a dozen children; he thought of Chinese babies disturbing Buddhist services by their impudent noisy mimicry of the officiating priests—and nobody minding in the least; he thought of that Chinese alchemy which, practised by a few mission converts, could transmute English low-church highflown nineteenth century theology into something useful, rational and undisturbing; he thought of the unpretending opportunism of local politics; he thought of merry grimacing mummers at Chinese funerals. "Absolutely prosaic," he thought. "Really a splendid people—splendid—splendid."

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Mr. Lorne said, "Here is my wife—alone."

In a moment Mrs. Lorne stepped on to the verandah and into the diningroom. "Has he come?" she asked. Her face was glowing with a gentle excitement. It had refreshed her very much to minister to some one she had so nearly disliked.

The distant sound of Sibelius' 'Valse Triste' stopped suddenly with that gulping yawp peculiar to interrupted gramophones.

"Oh Edgar—is he not here?" cried Mrs. Lorne. "He ran away again before I could stop him though I said, 'Stop, dear Mr. Cotton, don't go away again, it's very late and your dear wife waiting for you and quite anxious I am sure,' I said. But he was gone though I went on saying, 'Mr. Cotton—stop—stop,' but of course thinking he was quite all right again now and a touch of iodine wherever the skin was broken. I lent him your Sunday suit, Edgar dearie, though very much too small of course and here's your coat, put it on quickly, daddie dear, the cold night air, and I looked everywhere for him thinking perhaps a joke or possibly a trifle feverish or I walked too slow for him, but I heard him walking away across the grove. So I ran as quickly as I could along the short cut thinking 'I shall find him there when I get to the Cottons' but I'll just make sure'—and now he is not here...."

"Oh *damn it all*" said Mr. Diamond. "Are we never to be done with finding Clifford Cotton and losing him again?"

"Yes," said old Mrs. Cotton's harsh voice at the door. "You are done now. He is fou-hound. He is safe in his American ho-home. Not a changeling. Not a changeling any more. My son has come ho-home—after seven years...."

CHAPTER XIV

I am no more a mourner.

Since I have forgotten

That I was born—

Lo—I am not.

Be choked, my life, in a noose

Of strong night; I hoped no better.

If for me no sun rose,

No terrible sun shall set.

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I have no fears,
Though the night come with thunder.
Why should I mourn the stars,
Who knew no sun?

Should I not be proud
To be so safe?
Forgetting glory now,
I shall not again know grief.

When Lena, huddled at her window, heard Mr. Lorne shut the garden gate, she straightened herself and looked out at the moonlight with a wide excited stare. She watched the moon slide upwards, and the stars smoothly free themselves in groups from the jagged dark skyline of the grove. It was as if the moon and the stars were wild monstrous creatures assembling, and she their fascinated prey.

"Why is it that life is so very strong and overflowing, and yet cannot fill this body of mine?"

The moon was wedged in the right-hand corner of the window. "It's going up out of my sky for ever," said Lena. "This is the last time I shall see the moon."

She remembered a moon of her childhood. She remembered lying in bed, a sick child, coughing and crying, watching the moon bowling up an invisible slanting line from pane to pane of her window. Then, as now, the moon had seemed to flaunt the possession of something that she could not share. She had felt an intolerable hunger for comfort. "Mother—Mother...." And her mother had come running in, carefully calm in demeanour, dressed in a pink flannel dressing-gown. "What is it, my kitten? What does my kitten want?" "I don't know. I don't know.... Oh, Mother, I want a Wonderful Surprise."

"A Wonderful Surprise ... Tck tck ... a Wonderful Surprise...." Her mother had looked helplessly round the room ... at the climbing moon ... at all the expensive doctors' things bought to keep the child alive. "Tck tck ... a Wonderful Surprise.... What kind of surprise, dearest? Tell me and I'll do anything I can...." The poor lady's mind had been palpably empty of ideas. Lena remembered her own hopeless tears. "Oh Mother ... of course if I tell you it'll spoil it—besides, I don't know.... It's just that I want to wake up in the morning and find a Wonderful Surprise under the pillow, and be very happy and surprised...."

"Why of course she shall have her Wonderful Surprise. Mother's Kitten must go to sleep and in the morning—oh—what will she find under the pillow? Something the fairies will have brought from the moon, perhaps...." The child Lena had lain awake, coughing and feverish, unable to sleep for thinking of

perfect happiness on its way to her at last ... a Wonderful Surprise in the morning ... a new Lena in the morning....

She had heard her mother coming, she had heard her mother breathing carefully at the door, listening for proofs of sleep. Lena had pretended to sleep—stifled her cough for a moment. She had felt her mother's hand slip under the pillow and away again, had heard her mother's breathless retreat.

What a little tiny surprise! ... It had scarcely made any lump under the pillow at all.... The thing had gone wrong—she knew it at once. What had she expected—to find immortal joy under her pillow? She put her hand under the pillow—already hopeless. There was a small oblong parcel there, wrapped thinly in tissue paper. She drew it out and looked at it by the light of the moon. It was tied with blue baby-ribbon; a little piece of goldy paper, cut in the shape of a star, was pushed under the ribbon and showed the words: "For Mother's Darling Kitten—a Little Surprise."

But Lena had not opened it. She could feel it through the paper. She knew what it was. It was that wooden pen that Father had brought Mother from Switzerland long ago. There was a sitting-down wooden bear on the end of it. Lena had often fidgeted with it on her mother's writing table—often vaguely asked if she might have it for her own. She put it back under the pillow unopened; she buried her agonised face in her pillow. "A Wonderful Surprise ... a Wonderful Surprise ... there's no such thing in the world as a Wonderful Surprise for me...."

And now, thirty years later, she waited still, hopelessly for the Wonderful Surprise that was her due. Tonight, as thirty years ago, every little white moth that blew across the moonlight could boast the possession of something that was denied her. For a few hours last night, it had seemed that life accepted her at last—that she was to be given a gift better than any she had longed for—that the gift was in her hands. She had not been able to receive it with joy—her capacity for joy was atrophied. But she had been dimly conscious of glory on its way to her—after a long ordeal. "Why wasn't I happy? Why wasn't I mad with joy while the hope lasted? I might have known that, for me, finding was only a postponement of loss. Why didn't I dare to feel glorious while I might? If he was a flame—why didn't I catch fire? To burn my soul away would be better than to feel it die slowly in the cold...."

The regular rise and fall of the cicadas' purring note sounded like, "Why—why—why?" But the rhythm was interrupted by a blurred sound of music. Daley's Victrola had begun to defy the night's challenge with a weak incantation.

Lena listened. "I ought to have been born a machine," she thought. "Or an American...."

She listened. Her fingers, against her will, were strumming out the 'Shepherds' Dance' on her knee.

"Death is the cure," she thought suddenly. "One can't have death by halves at least."

She listened. And while she listened she laid her plans for death. A beam ran across the room, several feet below the ceiling, buttressing up the frail plaster walls. To that beam she could hitch a rope, if she had one. She knew how to make a slip-knot. She had always been good at knots—good, for instance, at tying up parcels. Years ago she used to send a great many presents to people she knew, in the hope of making friends of them. Now she would tie her last knot, seal and despatch the last gift of all—a gift of death to poor Lena. A Wonderful Surprise.

Her eyes wandered about the room, looking for more appliances for her purpose. But her ears were worried by the distant silly music.

"I can't die to music like that," she thought. But she could not shut out the sound. She could not even stop her fingers from hammering out 'Poppies' on her knee. 'Poppies'—she had accompanied some fool who sang it once at one of the suburban music halls—twenty years ago—gallant little Japs—rising sun flags....

She heard the wild screams of Milady's laughter on the other side of the house. She listened. "Poor old Milady. She's never missed anything...." After the screams there was a rustling and a gradual subsiding in the garden and grove, as though many little wild things had been awakened and were now soothing one another. And while Lena strained her hearing, resentful yet somehow jealous of that crude laughter, she heard a heavy tread among the trees and then a crackling pause, as though some hurried traveller had suddenly stood still to watch from the shadows.

And she saw the face of Clifford Cotton, like a mask pinned suddenly upon the dark wall of the grove. All the moon's fingers pointed suddenly to that blank face. It was transfixed upon an oblique spear of moonlight.

Lena felt as though her heart flamed up and was extinguished in a breath.

"He's mine after all. Yes, he's not a man—he's a fairy after all. I won't call. I won't call. If he comes to me it must be his own doing—if he comes, it will be life at last. A Wonderful Surprise."

The face gave no news. It was round and blank and still, like a little moon risen in a new low sky. Lena could see the eyes in the mask glitter. She could see that the eyes were fixed ambiguously upon her face.

"I won't call. I won't call. I won't even pray. I won't spoil it by asking, this time...."

But her lips were soundlessly forming her appeal. "Oh, fairy ... fairy ... fairy...."

And the next moment he was gone. The shining face was suddenly quenched in shadow.

She watched for the shadows to part again. "Fairy ... fairy ... fairy ..." she whispered. "I'm here. Here's all my wisdom for you...."

But she could hear the rustling of his retreating steps. It seemed as though shadowy curtains, one after another, further and further away, swung open to admit him and closed between her and the fugitive. The stirring in the darkness dwindled to a spark of sound and was blown out. There was no sound but the "Why—why—why?" of the cicadas, and the faint raving of the gramophone.

Lena made a little broken sound like a cry at a feverish awakening. "Well," she said aloud, "it's only death after all...."

She let her shawl drop into a limp coil on the window seat and walked about the room in her thin nightgown, looking for a pair of scissors. She cut off the three long cords of the window-blinds. She tied all three to the window bolt and began plaiting them together. The even movement of her hands made her thoughts rise and fall like waves of the sea. "Lena? she's dead.... Lena? she died long ago.... Lena—Lena—what was she like? Oh I don't know—poor Lena—she died so long ago."

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The music of the gramophone stopped. Quite suddenly—in the middle of the 'Valse Triste'—silence swallowed the tin music in one gulp. "That's better," thought Lena. "It dirtied the clean noise of the crickets. I'm glad a machine won't be the last creature to speak to me...."

There was nothing to do now but pull the chair across under the beam and climb on it. She did this. The chair was too low. It was also obstinately firm on its feet. It would be a difficult thing to kick away. The little table would be better. It was fragile and might even help by collapsing at the right moment.

The stagger, scrape, tinkle and crash of the forgotten glass of barley water and the hand-bell, as she tilted the little table, made her cry out. She tried to listen for steps coming to interfere. But she heard no sound except the roaring in her ears. Her thin shins hurt her as she knelt on the little table.

Old Mrs. Cotton, in the doorway, attracted by the little urgent silver crash of the breaking glass, seemed to see two Lenas—the Lena she had expected to see limply hunched in bed, and another Lena, kneeling on a table near the window. The moonlight in the window behind this other Lena made a mere blur of the thin garment she wore, so that her silhouetted body looked almost naked—almost bare even of flesh.

"Fairy ... fairy ... fairy ..." Lena was chanting to herself in a thin whisper, as she fumbled with her rope.

"It's no use calling fa-hairy in this house now," said old Mrs. Cotton. "There are no fa-hairies now...."

The old woman, so used to witchcraft—so weary with unsurprised old age, did not wonder why Lena, at the sound of her voice, collapsed from her high kneeling eminence and flung herself on the bed crying wildly.

Old Mrs. Cotton found her difficult slow way across the room to a chair beside the bed.

"You have lo-host your changeling lover," she said. "And I my changeling son."

Lena did not answer. She lay face downward, making no sound now.

"They have taken back their own. With music—with mu-husic they stole him away. They have sent home to us—something they have no use for—my son, lost seven years ago. Even so far away—he could hear—the—call—of—America.... American mu-husic brought him home ... American mu-husic is—answered—at—last...."

"Who has come home?" asked Lena in a smothered voice.

"Some one you never knew—Culliffudde Cotton, my son...Daley lo-host him—seven—years—ago ... and I found a fairy in his stead. Eh—what a change for me.... For my son Culliffudde was a fool—so manly—so practical—so good-hearted.... He used to call Daley his American swee-heetheart and take her to the movies.... Well. Well. We have the American ho-home complete at last. He came home from fairyland five minutes ago and found his American swee-heetheart playing her mu-husical-box. I was there. I could see at once that this was the fool I bo-hore. He had one of Daley's *cute* little pu-huppies in his hands and he said, 'Here's a snapdragon for you, swee-heetheart, it has no teeth. I was right.' Oh, how he laughed! Oh, how she cri-hied! Oh, how they hu-hugged each other.... Oh, what a happy—American—home...."

"Perhaps," said Lena slowly, lifting a distraught face, "perhaps the world's a little better for the loss of a stony-hearted fairy...."

"Perhaps it is a little better," said old Mrs. Cotton. "A little ki-hinder. A little more American. But oh," she cried, raising her knotted hands before her face, "but oh—there are so many men, and—so—few—fairies...." Her voice died away on a low murmur, "No more...no more fairies...."

THE END

[End of *Goodbye, Stranger* by Stella Benson]